



say no to
DISCIPLESHIP?!?

[five suggested shifts toward making
disciples as Jesus intended]

by Jason C Dukes

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BIO

Jason and Jen have been married since August 1998. They met at **Union University** in Jackson, TN. Since July 2013, they have lived with their six wonderful kids in northeast Mississippi where Jason pastors and coaches leaders. The Dukes family is thankful to have been a part of helping to start and lead **Westpoint Church** (west of Orlando, FL from 2003 to 2013), helping to create and shape **House Blend Cafe** (a for-profit restaurant in Ocoee, FL that exists to serve good food and serve their community that was featured on the Today Show in November 2013), helping to start and multiply the **Reproducing Churches Network** (unifies city leaders in order to see new expressions of the church in their community), and helping to unite and encourage **the Church of West Orange** (many local church expressions being the church together to the people of West Orange County Florida and beyond).

You learn more about Jason and his family at JasonCDukes.com and SENTkids.com. He has written the following books:

- ***Live Sent: you are a letter.***
- ***Cartas Vivas*** (Spanish version of Live Sent)
- ***beyond MY church: thinking and living that the world might know***

INTRODUCTION

Jesus said to make disciples. But are we, as His church, *actually* doing it? Are our equippers, or pastors, actually equipping for it?

Sure. We do something called "discipleship." But is that the same thing? Is that what Jesus intended when He commanded us to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:18-20)?

This is a question our local church expression had been asking for some time. And I have seen some major rethinking occur for the folks who were only doing "discipleship" but are now actually making disciples daily.

The New Testament does not mention "discipleship." In the American church, we have emphasized it as the process of learning that happens after evangelism efforts convert someone. We think of discipleship typically as a study for Christians in a classroom with fluorescent lights. What the New Testament does mention, however, is the command of Jesus to "make disciples." The way He taught it and, more importantly, modeled it, was highly relational and inclusive of evangelism and missions and ministry and service and worship.

Being a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples of Jesus is not just one of the things we do as followers of Jesus. It is our identity. The Sent One declared us to be His sent ones (John 20:21).

Remember, He told His followers that He would make them to become fishers of men (Mark 1:17). The words from the original language translated in His statement "make you to become" are identity words. They describe who we are, or more appropriately who we are becoming, or even more appropriately who Jesus is making us to become.

Being a disciple who makes disciples of Jesus is about ongoing relationship. We make disciples out in the rhythms of the daily. Although a bible study can be involved at times, learning happens in the midst of living. We can study about the commands of God and teachings of Jesus, but a living Word comes alive in everyday living. Our selfishness is usually not exposed and called to accountability in a lecture from a master teacher, but rather is exposed and called to accountability in friendships centered around the Master Teacher. We learn enduring love and conflict resolution and

gracious forgiveness and compelling compassion in the midst of relationships, not in the midst of a classroom.

To make disciples, in my opinion, very simply is to learn and live the ways of Jesus together. The "together" may be those who are continuing to follow Jesus, who have just begun to follow Jesus, or who have yet to follow Him. But making disciples encompasses all of the stages of belief, because we never quit learning Jesus.

How do we learn and live His ways? Well, as the church, it happens as we **believe** that we are loved by the God who came near. Believing His love, we then **experience** His love as we take initiative to love one another as His church. Experiencing His love together, we then are **compelled** together to take initiative to love the people we encounter in our daily rhythms as well as anyone the Spirit puts on our hearts (among our neighbors or even among the nations around the world).

Unfortunately, discipleship tends to prohibit the third element of learning and living the ways of Jesus described in the previous paragraph - the compelled to go love first. This is a problem, because the One we follow loved us first, not waiting for us to say we were sorry, not waiting for us to ask for help. No, His was and is a proactive love. He listens and looks and anticipates and serves. That is what He did. It is why He did not hold on tightly to the divine benefits He deserved (Philippians 2:4-8), but rather put on skin and came near to declare His love for us.

If His church does not love in this way, then we are not loving as He commanded us (John 13:34-35). But please remember, this is not about a service project or a mission trip. This is about rejecting what we have called "discipleship" and embarking on a journey together to make disciples. Be salt to bring out His taste. Be light in darkness. Together.

This is His intent for His church. This is the purpose of the church.

We do not embody His near love by only "going to church." We embody His near love when we live as His church. We cannot only proclaim His Gospel in an enclosed auditorium behind a podium. We also, and possibly more so, must proclaim His Gospel in engaged relationships full of grace and truth.

Jesus took up residence among us (John 1:14) that we might see grace and truth on display. He engaged in relationships, some that grew to be profoundly intimate, others that grew to be quite disagreeable, but the embodiment of "on earth as it is in heaven" required the stuff of heaven on earth. Not buildings made by men, but rather human sanctuaries of friendship united by Jesus being transformed to be like Him (Ephesians 2 and 3). We learn Jesus as His church more than in any other method when we practice it together in engaging relationships that invite those Jesus called "lost" along with us, remembering the love we have been given is to be given away.

All of this making disciples activity in the midst of our daily rhythms is done with the hope that those with whom we are walking will also believe they are loved by Jesus and begin to experience His love and be compelled to give His love that their friends might believe that they are loved and experience His love and give His love that their friends might believe and experience and give away, and so on.

But what about me? What about my family's needs? If all we do is this making disciples stuff, when will we be cared for?

Great question! I get asked it often, but I am usually burdened by the way people respond to the answer.

We get cared for by those with whom we are living sent lives as well as by those to whom we are living sent lives.

The church is not some program or event or place that serves the needs of my family once we follow Jesus. The church is people following Jesus together, learning and living His ways (especially His new command – John 13:34-35). We gather. We worship. We do life together. But why? Because of what Jesus prayed in John 17:18.

18 In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world.

I am not saying that the church doesn't care for my family. I am NOT saying that the church should neglect its family members while caring for everyone else. I have been accused of this before, but it is *a gross misunderstanding* of "making disciples" usually based upon presuppositions that come from

previous church experience. I am just saying that the purpose of the church isn't *only* about my family. Unfortunately, many of us treat the bride of Jesus in this way, like she should be all about my growth and my care and my spiritual experience.

But what if the intent of Jesus for His church was not to care for my family but rather that we might be family?

More specifically, that we might be His family who lives as family with the people of our communities like He did with us. This is what He did. He even called those He was journeying with His family, comparing them to His brothers and mother who were waiting outside (Matthew 12:46-50).

When we follow Jesus together as family, caring for the needs of each other, then His near love is on display. When we live as family separated from the world around us, set apart but isolated away from them, then we fall short of His mission which He gave to us (and fall short of our understanding of His holiness). However, when we live as family in the midst of our world, set apart in the midst of, then we invite the lost and lonely along with us to be family that they might believe the God Who came near loves them and desires them in His family.

But how will they know if all we do is think in terms of "my family?" How will they know if we don't go near (Romans 10:9-15)?

This is a critical issue with our current forms of "discipleship." It separates us from the world around us into learning environments with other Christians that tend to become self-absorbed groups rather than Jesus-compelled family. It is irrational in its purpose, because we declare that this form of "discipleship" will move us to be more like Jesus, even shape us to be on mission as He intended. But how will this ever happen when our friendships with those who are not following Jesus, who have not yet believed the love of the God who came near, become secondary at best and too often extinct?

This is why we must say no to discipleship if we hope to make disciples as Jesus intended. My prayer is that this book will encourage and equip us to begin to think and live with a different understanding of "discipleship" as we know it, and therefore, move us to actually make disciples as Jesus intended.

INTRO # 2 _ SOME NECESSARY CONFUSION

[a few questions that highlight the need to say no to discipleship]

So why the question marks and exclamation point in the title? Because, to suggest that we should say no to discipleship might sound a bit confusing. Confusion is not a bad thing. We often discount it as such, but most educators are taught that confusion is the catalyst for change. And my question marks and exclamation points in the title are not the only sources for confusion.

When I dialogue with people from various local church expressions both across the southeast and even in the northern parts of our country, they are saying a lot of the same thing - that the way we have been doing discipleship has not produced the fruit that they think Jesus intended. I hear them assert that our common forms of discipleship have not led to the lives moved by the Spirit that Paul and Peter and John and Luke wrote about.

May I suggest that our typical forms of discipleship from the last 30 years were an exaggerated reaction to the typical forms of evangelism from the previous 30 years? Let me offer two examples.

A gentleman who mentored me from 2005 to 2010 is named Bill Faulkner. He has told me on several occasions the story of his coming to trust Jesus as one of the converts from the "million more in 54" campaign of 1954. His take on that experience and the 12 years that followed includes frustrations about feeling left unattended after he was converted as well as disillusionment regarding the marketing tactics of the church during that time. The effort was to win as many as possible. Walking together with them to grow in Christ with love on mission after that? Well, that wasn't part of the campaign.

By the late 1980s, leaders had become quite disenfranchised with the results from these hyper-evangelistic efforts and overt seeker-sensitive tactics, and thus leaders did what most leaders do with extremes. They pushed away from them creating a strong pendulum swing leaving most traces of evangelism behind to embrace studying God's Word with an extreme gusto. One exaggeration to another. Hyper-evangelism to hyper-discipleship. Another way to say hyper-discipleship might be "personal

discipleship," but I promise I am not trying to pick a fight here. Just get us moving toward obedience. Stay with me please.

Confusion was present in both seasons. By the end of the first 30 years, with bewilderment one might have questioned why this didn't result in enormous cultural transformation? Evangelism is what Jesus wants us to do, right? Then, coming to the end of the second 30 years, one might be wondering why a hyper focus on discipleship didn't produce an exponential number of biblical thinkers who honored Jesus and could adequately defend the morals of Christendom? Well, it might be because, with regard to evangelism, Jesus didn't say to make coverts. And with regard to discipleship, Jesus didn't say to make apologists.

Jesus did say to make disciples, though.

And is it possible that how we have compartmentalized the two (and you can throw in ministry and service and worship and others if you want) was not what Jesus intended at all?

There is a current reaction to the hyper-discipleship of the last 30 years from some denominations that I am *NOT* suggesting in this book. The reaction I am not suggesting in this book is the notion that we have spent too much time thinking and not enough time just being nice to and accepting of each other. Everyone is okay, the people that associate with this reaction assert. Why can't we just all get along?

This makes a mockery of the Gospel. Because if we could just all get along, then Christ died needlessly (read Galatians).

I am not suggesting we return to intellectual crusades that leave a wake of inferiority complexes and judgmentally wounded people. I *AM* suggesting, though, that just accepting each other is not loving each other. For when our self-absorbed, individualistic preferences are surrendered to the One who both atoned for our sins as well as invited us onto His mission of reconciliation, then and only then will the world believe in the One who was sent (John 17:18-23). God uses our being reconciled from our selfish tendencies as the means through which to put on display His Gospel alive among us.

Maybe there is a better reaction than acceptance and niceness.

Francis Chan offers the allegory of commanding his daughter to go clean her room. In a popular YouTube clip, he suggests that he doesn't intend for his daughter to come back to him excited that she memorized what he said - "*Go clean your room,*" *Chan 1:1*. Nor does he intend that his daughter return to exclaim that she gathered with some of her friends to study what he said and discuss its many nuances and implications. No, he intended for her to obey. He intended that she actually clean her room.

What a novel idea. Jesus might actually want us to make disciples. Not just go and get people attracted to Him, as hyper-evangelism did. Not just retreat to study about why and how Jesus wants us to live and behave and sometimes make disciples, as personal discipleship did. But actually make disciples.

Again, please stay with me. I am not the only one questioning whether we need to say no to discipleship as we know it. Here are a few others.

Neil Cole agrees and poses the challenge in a provocative question.

Does having a church lead to making disciples or making disciples lead to having a church?

Maybe the mission is to learn and live the ways of the Kingdom. Maybe the church is the community of people that emerges from this learning and living. Maybe all the functions of the church happen in the midst of our discipling relationships, like caring for each other and helping others trust Jesus and serving both locally and globally and gathering to be encouraged and equipped.

George Patterson asserts that our modern forms of discipleship extract followers of Jesus out of the darkness of our world stifling their opportunity to lovingly need each other as well as compellingly be salt and light.

Jeff Vanderstelt asks of modern discipleship efforts, "Have we idolized bible study?"

Alan Hirsch proposes that community, or as he describes it "*communitas*," is necessary to learn and live the ways of Jesus. One cannot love and obey Jesus as a result of isolated, personal discipleship.

So all this confusion, and now what? Here's a thought.

What if we shifted from discipleship as an isolated, self-improvement process to a self-denying rhythm in family-like relationships with others? Can you learn Jesus alone? Can you learn Him apart from relationships that embody His teachings as well as His grace? Can you learn Jesus without living what is learned, without experiencing life as He intended? Furthermore, in order to "make" a disciple, wouldn't you have to live out these family-like relationships as light in darkness, including both those who had trusted Jesus as well as those who had not yet trusted Him?

What is the goal of this thing we have called "discipleship" anyway? Is it just to know more about God? To better ourselves? To become good?

Not to add to the confusion, but may I pose one more question before we dive into the suggested shifts toward making disciples as Jesus intended? Well, I am going to anyway. :-)

Think about this - *can a process of learning more about God make us good?*

You might rebut that no one is doing discipleship in an effort to make ourselves good. Are you sure, though? I ask because I sense that the very ways we have measured behaviors and have defined holiness suggest that we do think discipleship can make us good. And this is a very, very serious issue.

Most discipleship models seem to be based on the thought that we should strive to be good. Please hear me!!! We will never move with Jesus with this kind of thinking, for we will constantly be distracted by our own goodness OR our own failures. We will never see "on earth as it is in heaven" with this kind of methodology, because we will be too busy cultivating into ourselves to cultivate into others.

We must surrender moralism and embrace His grace and His mission and His resurrection life. This is not about my goodness on display! Much more important is His goodness on display. Much more important than my perfected behavior is His reconciling love on display in our selfish lives that

by His grace can become united around His selfless mission. The Father's goodness shown rather than my good grown.

Are we so busy trying to make ourselves into masterpieces that we forsake His making us to become His masterpiece? Together, He is making a masterpiece of us to display His goodness. We are not called to make a masterpiece of ourselves to display our goodness.

We must surrender the presupposition that we can make ourselves good. If we follow Jesus but still live from a presupposition that we can improve ourselves, that we can ultimately be good, then we may be following moralism rather than Messiah. That would mean we are not a follower of Jesus as much as we are a follower of our own personal development and our own spiritual ambitions.

Ok. Enough of adding to the confusion. We are probably confused enough. What about those five suggested shifts?

These are merely suggestions. They are not dogmatic assertions that if read and not believed will result in eternal damnation. They are not end-times prophetic announcements that will usher us into the ultimate day of “Good News” on December 20-something-or-other. They are simply this simple guy’s perspective as I am begging God for wisdom on what we must think and do to actually equip people to make disciples in daily rhythms.

By the way, I really would value your feedback, since the ways of the Kingdom are learned and lived as we follow Jesus together. Agree or disagree. Dig it or hate it. Email me at invitingconversation@gmail.com with your thoughts and questions and let's sharpen each other and grow together to actually make disciples as Jesus intended.

SO, here goes the first suggested shift...

1 _ SHIFT ONE

[from gospel as presentation to gospel as presence]

How do you think of “the Gospel?”

Do you think of this “good news,” this most-important message, as a presentation that Christians should make so that other people can choose to be a Christian?

While it certainly is a “good news” message that we now as “letters from Christ” (2nd Corinthians 3:3) present to a world full of “bad news,” I would suggest that it is more than just something we present.

And I would suggest that in order for us to actually be making disciples, we must make a shift in how we think of “the Gospel” if we think of it only as a presentation we make or a tract that we hand out.

First, the Gospel is not a presentation we make as much as it is a presentation that has been made to us.

4 All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get. (2nd Corinthians 4:4, the Message)

God came near. While we were still sinners. Before we ever said sorry. Before we ever asked for help. That's good news!

Second, this Gospel was made known to us not just through a presentation but rather through an actual presence.

14 The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish. 15 John pointed him out and called, “This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has

always had the first word.” 16 We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift. 17 We got the basics from Moses, and then this exuberant giving and receiving, This endless knowing and understanding-all this came through Jesus, the Messiah. 18 No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-Expression, who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day.

(John 1:14-18, the Message)

God didn't just make a presentation in spoken Word. He came as Word alive. He embodied truth in a skin of grace that lived and died and lived again to declare His love.

Next, this Gospel, this “presence” of God coming near with His love to a people who had not acted very lovable, both wrecks us and restores us day after day after day as we move from death to life and are compelled to show a love that has been shown to us.

14 For Christ’s love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. 15 And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised. 16 From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know [Him in this way]. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, [he is] a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. 18 Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.” 21 He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

(2nd Corinthians 5:14-21, HCSB)

Our embodiment of reconciliation that this compels us to deliver a message of gracious reconciliation communicates the good news of the One who was not at all selfish taking our selfishness upon Himself.

And finally, we never quit needing this Gospel, and we never quit needing to tell the story of how this Gospel is wrecking and restoring us. However, we don't just need to present it. We need to share this story while living this story with presence.

9 Say the welcoming word to God-"Jesus is my Master"-embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation. 10 With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!" 11 Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this-heart and soul-will ever regret it." 12 It's exactly the same no matter what a person's religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. 13 "Everyone who calls, 'Help, God!' gets help." 14 But how can people call for help if they don't know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven't heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? 15 And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it? That's why Scripture exclaims, A sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God!

(Romans 10:9-15, the Message)

Just like the God who came near to us right into the middle of our darkness, may we go near daily into the darkness and shine His ever-present light. And may we go together. A family of ambassadors. Inviting others along into His family with us. Then learning what it means to be His, giving His love as He gave it to us.

May we make more than a presentation. May we show the same love that has been shown to us with actual presence. That would be a shift toward making disciples as Jesus intended.

2 _ SHIFT TWO

[from learned to learner]

Followers of Jesus must shift from thinking of themselves as having to be LEARNED before they make disciples toward having to be a LEARNER in order to make disciples.

You may not have even thought about it before. But I actually hear it a good bit from people when we stress that each and everyone of us as followers of Jesus should be “making disciples” as we are going among both neighbors and nations. I hear this very worrisome excuse:

“...but I can't do that because I don't know enough to teach others.”

I assert that it is a significant excuse because it is very heartfelt. But I would suggest it is worrisome because, although heartfelt, it is a demonstration of a misunderstanding of the word “disciple.”

The word “disciple” does NOT mean “I know a whole lot, so much in fact that I can teach you all the ways of King Jesus so you should come sit in a classroom and listen to me teach and also grow to know enough one day to go and teach in front of a classroom.”

I am by no means discounting the importance of teaching in discipling. It is one of two key words in Matthew 28:18-20 – “to teach all that I have commanded you.” But we need to quit thinking about how to teach His ways like we have in the 20th century church under florescent lights to people in uncomfortable chairs, and instead we must look back to Jesus and how He taught the ways of the Kingdom under the light of the sun and the moon to a people with whom He walked in relationship daily.

The word “disciple” also does NOT mean “I don't have to learn anymore because I have earned my Jesus PhD and have my not-gonna-go-to-hell tenure and actually don't have to work hard anymore at teaching His ways to others.”

The roots of the word “disciple” actually imply a meaning more like this one:

I am a learner and will always be a learner, more like an apprentice, who learns from a Master and then imitates Him doing what I've seen Him do in my everyday.

We never learn enough to now have earned our “disciple degree.” We never quit being a learner who lives what is being learned. A disciple is a learner.

Not knowing enough, then, is not a valid excuse, if we understand the word “disciple.” At least that is my suggestion here. We actually would have to give an excuse as to why we *don't* live as learners who walk with our Master everyday and then try to live out together with others what we are learning so as to see the Kingdom actually show up right here and right now.

What if we moved from being a “teacher” to being a “learner?” What if that actually is teaching – when learning happens? What if we prioritized learning the ways of Jesus with others who are also learning His ways along with those who have not found their way in Christ yet?

What if we defined who we are as the church in these terms:

> a people who learn and live the ways of Jesus together, sharpening each other in His ways, introducing others to Him, and then learning together with Him how to live those ways in the rhythms of our daily lives as the Spirit changes us to be more and more like our Master <

So, there is my 2nd suggested shift. I don't have to be **LEARNED** to make disciples. But I do have to never quit being a **LEARNER** who goes and learns Jesus with others.

Hopefully it encourages many of you to move beyond what you see as a limitation (I don't know enough to teach) toward what is actually an opportunity – to learn and live the ways of the Kingdom within community together in the midst of a world longing for “on earth as it is in heaven.”

3 _ SHIFT THREE **[from "feed me" to "feed others"]**

I don't think I am exaggerating here. I would suggest that the common approach to what the American church has called "discipleship" tends to be a very self-absorbed, personal development track for which the primary motivation is to "*feed me.*"

This is not biblical.

At least that is what I am suggesting in SHIFT # 3.

Now in this we must be brutally honest with ourselves. Whether individual or family, married or single, child or adult, have kids or don't have kids, young or old. Do you look for a "church that meets my/our needs," or do you look for a people with whom you can both learn and live the ways of the Kingdom as well as together share them with those who may not even be following the King yet, among both neighbors and nations?

Is your motivation when it comes to "church" more about "feed me" or more about "feed others?" Get honest with yourself here, because the answer to this question is found in why you are even a part of the local church expression of which you are a part.

Say you are single. You looked around for a church family with a happening singles ministry. They gathered. They had events. People were becoming not-single thru this ministry. It looked good to you. And you really liked the band and the speaker. A perfect fit. You may have even invited some friends to join you. But what I have described above is not you as the church engaged with God on His mission daily making disciples. It is you as a consumer choosing a church that feeds you and meets your needs.

Say you are a mom and dad. You looked around for a church family with a happening student ministry. They gathered. They had events. Students behaved and dressed and spoke well. Even though they ate peanut butter from someone else's armpit during some skit on the first night you attended, you were cool with it, because they gave away great prizes to the kids. A perfect fit, right? But what I have described above to you is not you leading your family to be the church together engaged with God on His

mission daily making disciples. It is you as a consumer choosing a church that feeds you and meets your needs. I would go so far to even suggest this – if we as leaders don't actually live out the intended mission of God in front of and alongside those middle and high school students, a whole lot of them will not stick with the hollow consumerism that attracted them to be a part of a local church expression once they get into college and are met with many other attractive options.

[SIDE NOTE: I am not suggesting that a happening singles ministry or a hip student ministry are bad things. God uses them to transform people in Christ a lot of the time. I am focusing here on motivation and purpose.]

Wait a second!!! You scream out as you exclaim, “I HAVE NEEDS, TOO!!!” or “MY FAMILY HAS NEEDS TO!!!” I know. I do, too. Our family does, too.

Two questions, though. One, are you basing your “church choice” on a need or a want? And two, are you truly fulfilled in getting or giving?

Our family has needs, too. I just don't want my kids growing up having their attention spans grabbed for a season with an attractive ministry. I want them having their hearts gripped for life by a Savior who loved them first and now compels them to live with a beyond-me purpose – the only kind of life, in fact, that can even keep their attention and truly fulfill.

Furthermore, we must not forget what Jesus and Paul both taught about giving versus getting, about our needs being met and our life being full.

Consider these Scriptures:

38 “If you don't go all the way with Me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve Me. 39 If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to Me, you'll find both yourself and Me.

[Matthew 10:38-39, the Message]

11 “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that My joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. 12 This is My command: Love one another the way I loved you. 13 This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. [John 15:11-13, the Message]

12 So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. 13 Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. 14 And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. 15 Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. 16 Let the Word of Christ-the Message-have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! 17 Let every detail in your lives- words, actions, whatever-be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way. [Colossians 3:12-17, the Message]

It sounds counter-intuitive, but our personal needs are only truly met when we live loved and give love. Our needs are only fulfilled when we trust that we have been loved first by a God who was willing to demonstrate that love through sacrifice, and we then live daily to give His love away into the lives of others. And not just through a service project. But through deep relationships in which “on earth as it is in heaven” is beginning to blossom, among both the “lost” and the “found,” via shared life together in the daily rhythms of our lives.

Hopefully those relationships are ones that do not just provide refuge and a false sense of security. Hopefully, they are relationships that purposefully and intentionally push us toward disciple-making and mission engagement and selfless living because that is the mission around which those relationships have united and for which they ultimately have purpose.

We must move from “feed me” to “feed others.” And probably more appropriately, from “feed me” to “share what has been given to me with others” so that we can experience love and life as Jesus intended.

He loved us first and asks us to love as He has loved us.

4 _ SHIFT FOUR

[from "one is singular" to "one is plural"]

When you read the word “you” in the Scriptures of the New Testament, do you understand it as speaking to “me” or speaking to “we?” Because I want to suggest, and I think a lot of really smart people, much smarter than me, who have studied biblical Greek and who love Jesus, would agree with me here – in the New Testament Scriptures the word “you” (as translated in English) the large majority of the time is properly understood in terms of “we” not “me.”

It’s one of those nuances in the English language that trips us up. Most all languages on earth have distinguishing words for “you” that indicate clearly between 2nd person singular and 2nd person plural. English does not. This is to our detriment.

In the English translations, we tend to read “you” with “me” more in mind. I want to suggest to you two reasons why this is might need to be reconsidered.

(1) because to Jesus, ONE is plural.

In John 17, Jesus prayed that His followers would be one with the Father and one with each other the way that He was one with the Father. He defined “oneness” here in terms of “we” not “me.”

Now, you know this. And yet the tendency in American church culture is to turn bible reading and prayer and fasting and church attendance and serving into me-first rituals that develop myself to be better rather than others-first initiatives that are catalytic for community development and loving relationships that mirror “on earth as it is in heaven.”

For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, almost every “you” is plural, except for the instance of Jesus teaching on personal prayer. But otherwise, He is describing in Matthew 5 to 7 the ways of the Kingdom lived out in together form rather than in personal form.

If I take this to heart, then I must change the way I read “you” in the New Testament. At least, I must ask the question, “Is this speaking about ‘me’ or ‘we’ here?”

Here is the second reason why I would suggest that we need to reconsider thinking of "you" in terms of "me" rather than "we."

(2) because I would suggest that spiritual maturity, at least as I understand Jesus’ teachings, cannot be measured with a mirror but rather only within community.

Fruit in my life that blossoms is intended to be fruit given, not fruit consumed by me. Thus, the focus of my maturity cannot be to feel personally fulfilled at the end of each day when I look in the mirror and measure my day’s performance. Maturity is not measured personally as much as it is evidenced lovingly. Within relationships. Within community. Learning shared, not learning hoarded. Life given, not life gained.

[For more reading on why we might need to rethink spiritual maturity, check out appendix three.]

If I take this to heart, then my reason for following Jesus and for being a part of a local church expression may need to change. It’s confusing. And transformational. And disturbs my selfish religious practices pushing me toward actually making disciples.

One is plural in the Kingdom of Heaven. And “you” is “we.” At least that’s what I am suggesting here. And what I actually think the Scriptures suggest.

May we move toward one as plural.

5 _ SHIFT FIVE

[from live FOR God to live WITH God]

If I live focused only to be better personally, then who is the focus of my life?

I am.

However, if I live to share with others about the goodness of God, who is the focus of my life?

He is. And others are.

The former approach is what I would suggest is living to be “good FOR God.” The latter approach is what I would suggest is living to “go WITH God.” I want to suggest that Jesus intended the latter for His followers – that we not live FOR Him but WITH Him.

Two reasons why I would suggest this.

(1) because Jesus said so.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me.

(John 15:5 HCSB)

21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

[John 20:21, HCSB]

He wants us to abide with Him. He is sending us to follow Him. To go WITH Him. Not just to do stuff for Him. He said in Matthew 28:18-20 that He would be WITH us always.

(2) because Jesus avoided the compliment “good,” which might be an indication that I should, too.

18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

[Mark 10:18, NASB]

Get honest with yourself. Do you study the Scriptures for nourishment for daily mission or for information for self-development?

The rich young ruler in this passage seemed clearly to be looking for another reason to consider Himself good, to feel personally fulfilled with his accomplishments. Jesus did not live to that end, and He rebuked the rich young ruler with His very to-the-point response.

Jesus did not end the day hoping to feel good about Himself or His efforts. He did not practice religion for personal goodness. He lived to glorify His Father in heaven, period. Attention to His own works He considered a distraction from the work of His Father.

54 “If I glorify Myself,” Jesus answered, “My glory is nothing.”

[John 8:54, HCSB]

10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who lives in Me does His works.

[John 14:10, HCSB]

I personally need to beg God to keep making that same heart and desire present in me, that I would want to make His goodness known and His goodness only.

Please understand what I am suggesting here. It is absolutely true that each of us needs to grow. It is absolutely accurate that we each will always need to be shaped into what Jesus intended. However, the purpose of our further holiness is not so as to be personally holy, but rather so as to show others a holy, loving, gracious, near God. A focus on personal goodness is a focus off of mission, for my pursuits are not to be centered in personal gain but rather in the interests of others.

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than

yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

[Philippians 2:3-4, NASB]

So, one might ask what do you do with that “salt and light” verse about our good works (from the Sermon on the Mount)?

In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

[Matthew 5:16, HCSB]

You obey it. That’s what you do. It’s not about my personal goodness on display. It’s about my Father’s goodness on display in me. That’s the only thing it can mean if it has anything to do with His glory on display.

May we go preserve His presence and bring out the flavors of His presence right in the midst of this very how-could-God-even-be-present world by sharing His life given to us and His goodness proven together through us.

May we quit trying to just be good FOR God and actually daily go WITH God on mission to share this Gospel about a God who desires to be WITH us with a world who so often struggles to believe that the God who came near could possibly still be near today.

After all, when God spoke His “final Word” to us – Jesus – the New Testament uses a synonym – Emmanuel. Do you know what that word means? GOD WITH US.

That was the declaration from God when He moved into the neighborhood – He has always wanted us to live WITH Him (John 1:12-14).

If we will, then we will be that much closer to actually making disciples.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Don't settle for discipleship. Don't pretend anymore that discipleship as we have known it is what Jesus intended when He commanded that His followers make disciples. Don't let the goal of discipling, whether intentional or unintentional, be personal development.

Do make disciples. Do go with God as you grow with others as you live like family among neighbors and nations. Do let the rhythms of grace and truth, of love and discipline, and of encouragement and challenge exist among a group of people whom you walk with, who are believing the Gospel, are experiencing the Gospel, are learning the Gospel, and are compelled to share this Gospel in flow of conversation rather than forced conversation and in everyday relationships rather than every now and then classes.

This is church. All the other stuff we do that tends to be more about our wants and preferences, that we often make stomach-able by calling it discipleship, is just extra. And it might not be just extra. It might be distraction.

It might take us away from the very way Jesus intended that we make disciples.

APPENDIX ONE

[a chapter on "discipling" from the book *LIVE SENT*]

So, what is discipling? I want to suggest this basic definition:

Discipling is learning and living the ways of Jesus so that others learn and live His ways, too, so that others learn and live His ways, too, and so on.

Discipling is all about proclaiming the message that God has come near. As we live His ways, we show His love by how we come near as a friend to the people around us every day, not only through some service project. That's how other disciples are made—they catch it as we do life with them.

Thus, it is a process. However, it is not and must not be simply a linear process. It is instead a very fluid, ongoing process. . . .

Jesus taught His followers over time. He did this in the middle of relationship with them. He did this in the middle of a process that allowed them to learn and live, to be served and to serve, to have both theory and practice. He released them to connect and engage and learn and live and lead others to Him immediately. It is easy then to conclude that discipling is a process which has as its core value the necessity of doing life together.

Elements of the Ongoing, Never-ending Process

I would suggest three elements of discipling. These three do not flow from A to Z. They ebb and flow. Each may be involved at any one time, while all may be involved at any one time. It's kind of fluid like that, kind of messy like that, kind of unpredictable like that. Kind of like doing life together.

The first element I would suggest for the discipling process is **relationship**. Every aspect of learning the ways of Jesus and living the ways of Jesus is both validated and authenticated inside relationship. We were made for togetherness. We are stifled when we are alone. The church is people following Jesus together, not an individual. Relationship is paramount. Discussing the teachings of Jesus requires relationship. In fact, I have seen so often that true transformation happens in the midst of

ongoing relational dialogue. That's evident in the discipling process for those who walked face-to-face with Jesus.

Accountability for living out the teachings of Jesus requires relationship. Our culture pretends that hierarchical structures encapsulate accountability, but forced or enforced accountability is not true accountability at all.

When I do something for someone because I have to rather than because I want to, or when I am motivated by obligation rather than love, that is not accountability as described in the New Testament. It is not based in reciprocal relationship. It is not based in love. It is not based in common purpose with the goal of unified restoration and growth. It is, you do something for me or you are fired or don't get paid, etc. Accountability doesn't really exist, at least as modeled by Jesus and described in the New Testament, apart from relationship.

Multiplicative results for discipling cannot happen without relationship. Multiplication in the literal sense, being fruitful and multiplying, can only happen within relationship. In the figurative sense, the necessity for relationship is the same. If we are to see disciples made, then we must engage people in genuine friendship. Multiplication cannot be programmed. It happens. It blossoms. It is a product of relationships that flourish and have purpose.

When we befriend someone, our agenda must be more than just adding them to our church membership. Rather, we should walk with them in such a way that they taste and see the love of Jesus, that they witness His ways lived out, and that they learn His ways and follow. This multiplication becomes exponential when it is not constrained by programming standards. It becomes exponential when relationship allows it the freedom to blossom.

The second element I would suggest for the discipling process is **discernment**. Unfortunately, this element of discipling is often left out within programmed discipleship. Discerning where someone is spiritually and where someone is going in life is not required in programmed discipleship. You can simply plug someone into the linear process. Problem is, what results is a stifled disciple, which is actually an oxymoron.

Let me explain. As followers of Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit residing within us. Jesus spoke of the many ways having the Holy Spirit matters in the daily life of a follower as recorded in John 14 to 16. Paul follows that with some pretty insightful teaching in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. John also elaborates on it in 1 John 5. Among the many aspects of what the Spirit does in and through us is discernment.

As we engage people in relationship, we need to do more than think, What are the five steps I must take this person through so they will now be a disciple? Maybe a better approach would be to pray something like this:

Holy Spirit, please give me discernment into the heart and life of my new friend. Give me Your wisdom and insight so that I may know how to love them right where they are and encourage them for where You want them to go as we walk on this mutual journey with You.

What if we prayed that? Don't you think the Spirit would grant us discernment? Then, we would be pulled into an amazing adventure of learning the ways of Jesus and living out those ways alongside someone into whose life we are speaking encouragement and direction as the Holy Spirit leads us. If we would listen as the Spirit provides this discernment, we would be able to determine where on the journey a person is rather than pigeonholing them or trying to take them through a step-by-step process.

This is important. Think about it. If we discount where someone has been in their lives, we will miss out on ways God has already been at work in a person's life before we ever met them.

Jesus took this seriously. With Peter, Matthew, Mary, Nicodemus, the woman at the well. We must take it seriously too. It is important for us to realize that discipleship is not a program that begins after someone begins to follow Jesus. It is a process that even begins before conversion.

You can't argue with that principle either, because a cursory reading of the four Gospels makes it plain. Jesus invited 12 guys into relationship and entered into a journey with them that God the Father had already been walking on with them. In other words, He had already been at work. He was there through the tragedy and victories of their lives previous to their encounter with Jesus. Now, Jesus was going to complete the work that had

been begun and continue it toward more and more completion—the discipling process that never ends. . . .

The third element of discipling I would suggest is **release**. I believe it is safe to say that for the most part, church culture has made discipleship more about retention than release. People are encouraged to stay in discipleship programs rather than being released to actually disciple. Church gurus stress our need to grow the church, and what they mean is more people in gathering and in small groups.

I would suggest that Jesus wants to grow His church out there among the harvest, not in here among those already harvested. The harvest grows out there. . . .

Discipling is more than some class once a week that we market and hope for high attendance. It is learning and living all week. It is eating together. It is praying together. It is having fun together. It is doing things of interest together. It is serving together. It is doing life together.

That is the model of discipling that we were given by Jesus, but to make it easier on ourselves, we boiled it down to a formula and program and said, “Go through this class, and you will be disciples.” It’s not that classes aren’t important. It’s not that gathering together in classes or for collective worship is not important. It’s not that we don’t need to have Bible study together. These are important, but these can’t be the extent of our discipling.

On the first night our church family gathered as a core group, we shared four statements with those who gathered. One of them was this—we will not busy you with church activities, but rather we will equip and release you to be the church within your daily and weekly activities. This is a must if we hope for followers of Jesus to actually engage culture and see others begin to follow Jesus. . . .

Let’s surrender our programs and enter into this relational releasing process known as discipling and see what happens. Let’s live sent daily and be discipling. If we will, then we will be intentionally delivering a message, learning and living the ways of the Author, and giving other people the opportunity to see the Author in our ways. Then, they will learn and begin to live His ways too. Then, we will be discipling.

APPENDIX TWO

[an interview with EricGeiger.com]

Today I continue my 2013 **Discipleship Interview Series** with Jason Dukes. Like me, Jason is a New Orleans native. He currently serves as pastor of Westpoint Church in Orlando and is the author of *Live Sent* and *beyond MY church*.

Eric _ Discipleship is such a broad term, often a junk-drawer term that has been used to describe many things. How do you define it?

Jason _ Personally, I try to avoid using the word. When said in church culture, it seems to be a descriptor for biblical intellectualism rather than actually learning and living the ways of Jesus. Intellectualism is not a bad thing necessarily. But studying the Bible to know more while not surrendering to be changed to love more is a bad thing. Furthermore, it is a term that typically is used separately from “missions,” as though separate from the planting and watering of the Gospel into our relationships and encounters, and connected to the term “evangelism,” as though the next step once someone is “converted.”

This is not the case to Jesus. His teachings indicate no such dichotomy in these words. His teachings suggest that His church is to be sent to make disciples, planting and watering the Gospel into lives, learning and living the ways of Jesus, inviting those lost and those following to together journey along. It includes scripture study as well as scripturally grounded conversations. It happens in daily rhythms while drinking coffee or over a meal or while serving someone even in the simplest of ways. And it is best embodied in the midst of a group of people following Jesus together, proactively loving one another, grace upon grace counteracting ongoing issues, and uniting selflessly around the mission of Jesus surrendering selfish agendas.

Family of God inviting those lost and lonely to be family, to learn they are loved, to then live loved while giving love as it has been given to them. We

learn best when we teach. We grow most when we give. Jesus said as much in His challenge for us not to hold tightly to our lives lest we lose them, but rather to give life up that we may gain life.

To make disciples – to learn and live the ways of Jesus with a few folks inviting others along that they may learn and live His ways inviting others along that may learn and live His ways, etc.

Eric _ Who has been influential to you in forming your view of discipleship?

Jason _ My father. My brother. Dr. George Guthrie. Doug Dees. Neil Cole. Erwin McManus. Eugene Peterson. Tim Chester. Mike Breen.

Eric _ Do you see distinction between personal discipleship (a believer on his own) and corporate discipleship (a believer does in the community)?

Jason _ See the answer to number one. To add to that, a person invites others along to learn and live Jesus with them. A group embodies the grace and truth and love given as they endure both the beauty and hardship of growing toward the maturity of oneness in Christ and oneness as His followers. Victories celebrated. Conflicts not ignored but faced and embraced. Walking away set aside for walking together.

On the personal, confession and repentance are necessary daily. Denial of self and taking up of cross. Both regarding our own sinfulness as well as our tendency toward self-improvement. Because otherwise, idols of the heart stick around and we not only miss out on what Jesus is teaching us personally but we shortchange those with whom we walk because we get distracted with ourselves.

On the corporate, growing in Christ cannot be measured with a mirror, but only in community. The corporate provides the environment of relationships in which people can be encouraged and rebuked as well as equipped and sent.

Eric _ In terms of discipling new believers, what is of chief importance?

Jason _ To stress the ongoing need to preach the Gospel to ourselves daily, remembering our profound need for Jesus and being grateful that He has come near.

To encourage and equip for more than “reading the Word” and “prayer.” Rather, to encourage and equip for “relating with the Word” as we “listen and respond.”

To challenge them at least every year to ask Jesus “with whom” and “to whom” are You sending me, because we will always tend toward form over function and preservation over mission.

Eric _ How should a ministry define success in terms of discipleship? What does winning look like?

Jason _ Winning is evidenced when the definitive question of people’s lives shifts from “what do I need?” to “what do others need?” Winning looks like the interests of others mattering more than my own, and new believers moving toward selfless mission rather than self improvement.

Eric _ Is there such thing as “fully-discipled” in this lifetime?

Jason _ Absolutely not. A disciple is a “learner.” May we never stop learning Jesus.

APPENDIX THREE

[two articles on rethinking spiritual maturity as posted by NewHopeDigital.com in June and July 2012]

NEW HOPE DIGITAL

June 2012

reThink Spiritual Maturity 1

by: Jason C Dukes

What is "spiritual maturity" anyway? It is hoped for, sought after, desired among the American church. Our portrayal of it is well-intended, but is it possible we need to rethink our understanding of spiritual maturity?

First, are we thinking of a "spiritual" person in defining terms as "a spectator of what is supernatural" or "a participator with Who is supernatural?"

A spiritual spectator is one who rarely if ever engages in actual spiritual activity in an everyday way. Let me be specific.

We have tended among the American church to consider a person spiritually mature if their calendar is busy with Bible studies. But does learning more and more about spiritual things make us spiritually mature? Not if we never participate with the One Who is supernatural in those spiritual learnings.

Take Luke 3:11 for instance.

He replied to them, "The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same."

(Luke 3:11 HCSB)

We may study that verse. Even memorize it. But isn't our spiritual maturity evidenced by participating with Jesus in what He taught? His teachings are not an invitation to spectate spiritual life. They are an invitation to participate with Him.

Second, are we thinking of "maturity" with the goal of having matured or the journey of ever maturing?

Let me be frank. If we commonly have the notion that we have matured to the point of being better than anyone else, whether someone we would criticize as carnal within surrounding culture or someone we would critique as heretical within worshiping culture, then we are evidencing profound spiritual immaturity.

Jesus asserted that a begging-for-mercy, confessionally-sinful, gratefully-contrite heart is justified with God, whereas a thinking-I-am-beyond-the-need-of-mercy, pridefully-perfect, mistakenly-deserved heart is not (Luke 18:9-14). Maybe the more we actually walk with Christ, the less we think of our self-sufficiency and the more we think of our utter dependency.

Jesus did not seem to concern Himself with spiritual maturity, but rather with spiritual maturing. Following Him does not include an attempt to perfect myself. Rather, it does include a being made perfect by Someone other than myself.

Third, are we thinking of "spiritual maturity" as evidenced by knowledge and accomplishment or by wisdom and love?

Spiritual maturity is not evidenced by biblical intellectualism nor by energetic self-improvement. On the contrary, spiritual maturity is evidenced by the teachings of the Bible appearing as daily rhythms of my life while love and good deeds highlight His goodness rather than my own. Is the Bible learned through our heads or through our hands and feet? Is the goal my goodness noticed or His goodness seen?

So what do the Scriptures say?

I encourage you to go read at least the following four sections of Scripture along with others you may find yourself. See what they suggest.

- Isaiah 58:1-11
- Matthew 25:31-46
- 1st John 3:16-18
- 1st John 4:7-11

Do they support my above suggestions? Rebuke them?

We would appreciate your feedback and insight and assertions. I hope to get to interact and learn and then go live His ways with you through this interactive platform.

May we begin to rethink spiritual maturity.

Next month, I will offer a few suggestions about spiritual maturity as understood and lived among a local church family and community.

Until then...

NEW HOPE DIGITAL
July 2012
reThink Spiritual Maturity 2
by: Jason C Dukes

Last month on New Hope Digital, I suggested three questions to challenge us to rethink our understanding of "spiritual maturity." You can read the post by clicking [here](#). I promised that this month I would offer a few suggestions about how a spiritually maturing local church might gather and live and love together.

Let me start with a disclaimer. The church matters. It clearly mattered to Jesus. Nothing in this article suggests otherwise. What I am suggesting, however, is that we may need to rethink how we are understanding "spiritual maturity" in the context of the local church.

First, I would suggest that Jesus did not intend for His church to speak of people's maturity in terms of being "in church" but rather in terms of being "in Christ."

I have heard too often people declare maturity over someone with such descriptions as "look how much she is in church" and "he is back in church." But did Jesus intend that people be connected with His bride or with the Groom?

The real issue stems from our typical understanding of "church." Church is not a place or event. Church is not a list of religious practices. Church is the restored-by-love, now-compelled-to-love people of Jesus. Those people together are His bride. He is our Groom. We live by His love and in His love and for the sake of giving His love.

In John 13:35, Jesus said the world would know we are His disciples by our love for one another. The church loving one another and loving neighbors and nations together puts on display the near love of Emmanuel. God uses those daily, interactive, learning relationships to help the lost and lonely see how loved they are by Jesus. In relating with the church (the bride), they often then are moved to relate with Jesus (the Groom).

That is the burning question, then. Am I only relating with the church through its activities, or am I in Christ relating with the church and loving as the church daily in all my activities?

People are not spiritually mature because they are "back in church." They are exhibiting evidence of spiritual maturity when they are daily living "as the church."

Next, I would suggest that Jesus does not intend His church to cater to "spiritually mature" consumers but rather cultivate for spiritually mature caregivers.

People argue with me on this one and accuse me of thinking in extremes. But read me through here. The common argument I get is that it is more than okay for the church to have programs and events that encourage and serve their own families. I agree.

The problem is that we reap what we sow. If we sow for people to be given into through events and programs, then we reap people with an appetite for that. If we sow for people to be givers first, then we reap people who give into each other as we together give ourselves away. That's the issue. It IS okay to have programs and events for church families. But is it okay if the

emphasis and purpose of those events and programs are not to equip and encourage the church to live sent? Otherwise, people will constantly expect to be given into by the pastors and the programs.

The "given into" mentality results in a self-absorbed strategy that strives to keep people coming back. This certainly must be questioned when Jesus said on more than one occasion that He has sent His church as He was sent. Furthermore, that self-absorbed strategy results in attempts to make church events and programs more and more attractive.

However, WE CANNOT MAKE THE BRIDE PRETTIER THAN THE CROSS ALREADY DID, and our catering to consumers is not what Jesus intended. The "sick" mattered too much to Jesus to focus all of our attention on the "healthy" (Matthew 9). May we equip for compassionate caregivers instead who daily are living to make disciples.

Finally, I would suggest that Jesus never intended that we measure our spiritual maturity with a mirror, but rather by how we relate in community.

John recorded that Jesus commanded His followers to love one another as He loved them (John 12:34-35). John then, in his three letters, expounded on that command.

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

(1 John 2:7-11 HCSB)

This is how God's children-and the Devil's children-are made evident. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother.

(1 John 3:10 HCSB)

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

(1 John 4:7-11 HCSB)

The person who "has been born of God and knows God" loves. Our maturing in Christ is evidenced by our love. Our love cannot be on display when in front of a mirror, sizing up whether we were good enough that day or whether our efforts were "holy" enough. Our love is only put on display when walking with and in a community of people.

For far too long, the American church has measured spiritual maturity by personal goodness on display rather than God's goodness on display. Jesus avoided a compliment about His own personal goodness (Luke 18:18-19). So should we. God's goodness, however, is displayed when an otherwise selfish group of people unify to daily grow together becoming, by His Spirit, a transformed, selfless people.

We must be very cautious to consider the church-attender and Bible-toter and fish-on-the-car-displayer with all good appearances as spiritually mature. May we remember how loved we are, live secure in His love, and let His goodness be on display as we love generously daily.

Don't forget. We will never be "spiritually mature" this side of heaven, but we can certainly be spiritually maturing. And that journey of becoming will be characterized by grace, belief, confession, trust, learning, and love. A group of people becoming in those ways and giving themselves away together, now that would be a spiritually maturing church.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

[books leaders have recommended to me on the subject of disciple-making]

- ***Ordinary Hero*** by Neil Cole
- ***Tangible Kingdom*** by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay
- ***Disciples Are Made, Not Born*** by Henrichsen and Hendricks
- ***Master Plan of Evangelism*** by Coleman, Grunden, and Graham
- ***Journeys to Significance*** by Neil Cole
- ***Forgotten Ways*** by Alan Hirsch
- ***Right Here. Right Now.*** by Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford
- ***ReJesus*** by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost
- ***Shaping of Things to Come*** by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost
- ***Long Obedience in the Same Direction*** by Eugene H. Peterson
- ***Practice Resurrection*** by Eugene H. Peterson
- ***Unstoppable Force*** by Erwin McManus
- ***Building a Discipling Culture*** by Mike Breen
- ***Multipling Missional Leaders*** by Mike Breen
- ***The Great Giveaway*** by David E. Fitch
- ***Gospel-Centered Life*** by Bob Thune and Will Walker
- ***Living the Cross-Centered Life*** by CJ Mahaney
- ***The Discipline of Grace*** by Gerald Bridges and Jerry Bridges
- ***Untamed*** by Alan and Deb Hirsch
- ***Exiles*** by Michael Frost
- ***Cultivating a Life for God*** by Neil Cole
- ***Organic Church*** by Neil Cole
- ***Love Walked Among Us*** by Paul Miller
- ***A Call to Die*** by David Nasser
- ***One Life*** by Scot McKnight
- ***Kingdom Come*** by Allen M. Wakabayashi
- ***A Meal with Jesus*** by Tim Chester
- ***TradeCraft*** by Crider, McCrary, Calfee, and Stephens
- ***Everyday Church*** by Chester and Timmis
- ***Missional Essentials*** by Brad Brisco and Lance Ford
- ***The Great Omission*** by Dallas Willard
- ***The Monkey and The Fish*** by Dave Gibbons

- ***Gospel-Centered Church*** by Chester and Timmis
- ***Kingdom Matrix*** by Jeff Christopherson
- ***Gospel-Centered Teaching*** by Trevin Wax
- ***Gospel-Centered Discipleship*** by Jon Dodson
- ***Missional Essentials*** by Ford and Brisco
- ***The Cure*** by Lynch
- ***Incarnate*** by Frost
- ***Sentness*** by Hammond