

Session 5: Discipleship through Intentional Relationship

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19

This is a simple statement, but we often miss what Jesus is saying.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said. Making disciples begins with entering into an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It must start there. It’s through this relationship that Jesus makes us both his disciples AND disciple-makers – “fishers of men.”

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:4-5

Before we can think about **right doing** we need to first think about **right being**; being in an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus that radically changes us—the way we see ourselves, life, our time, money and energy, and our purpose.

We need to **know Jesus**—not just know about him. We must strive to know him very personally and intimately. Paul said nothing could compare to knowing Christ Jesus.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:8-9

Knowing God is primary. It is through that relationship and applying his word that fruit is exhibited in our lives. We must first focus on our relationship with God and learning and applying his word. The fruit will come.

Too often we make our journey following after Christ one of an accumulation of knowledge about Jesus and miss simply knowing him. What would a marriage look like if all the couple did was read about and study each other but never really spent time knowing one another in a deep and intimate way?

Jesus wants us to really know him and to be changed by him—to abandon ourselves completely to him—so that he can live in us and work through us. Following Jesus is giving ourselves over to him, allowing him to radically change us, and then experiencing him working through us. He’s calling us to an abundant, radical, life-altering, world-changing relationship with him.

And this isn’t just for our benefit; Jesus is asking us to dedicate ourselves to the mission he has given us—reconciling a lost world to God through Christ. And that begins with loving others through a very intentional, personal relationship like Jesus modeled with his disciples.

Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your

*neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
Matthew 22:37-40*

By following Jesus and allowing him to change us, we are empowered to love others. Through loving God and loving others in intentional relationship, everything else happens: people come to know him and are radically changed by him; people begin to mature in their faith, and then they start pouring their lives into the lives of others—disciples making disciples. That’s his plan!

But it’s only going to happen if we follow Christ’s model and method. Jesus’ idea of intentional relationship includes doing life together, being real and transparent, sharing our hurts, fears, and struggles along with our hopes, dreams, and victories. It also includes bringing in God’s word, wrestling with it, and applying it to our lives. Intentional relationship is born in love and matures in love. His love includes encouragement, but it also requires admonishment—recognizing when people are getting off track and then gently helping them back on the right path.

We have a wonderful picture of this kind of relationship in the early church.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

Two thousand years ago, people from the outside were looking at the church just like they are today. But today, people looking in see dysfunction, fighting, and disunity. They see people doing life alone with lives that look much like the rest of the world. It’s no wonder so many don’t want anything to do with the church today. Two thousand years ago, people saw something completely different, and it radically changed their lives.

These early believers loved God and abided in him. They were changed by God and began living a radical existence with one another—really doing life together. No longer self-centered and self-reliant, they lived out their faith dependent upon God and focused on the needs of others. The early church was a model of intentional relationship—both with God and with one another. This was irresistible to those looking in. Why? **Through how these early believers did life together, the people looking in saw what they were literally dying to have: they saw Jesus.**

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47b

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21

United in faith, purpose and mission, and doing what we were commanded to do—love God and love others—so that the world may believe! This is God’s plan!

In this session, we're going to talk more about intentional relational discipleship. We'll discover how building intentional relationships help us fulfill the mission to reconcile a lost world to God through Christ; following the Great Commission—to make disciples who can then make disciples.

DISCIPLESHIP: BEGINS WITH INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT POINT TO JESUS

Using the scenario below, think through the following questions:

Scenario (Feel free to change the gender of the characters to fit the needs of your group.)

You are a Christian. You live next door to Bob. Bob is married and has three young children. He is a construction worker. Bob works hard all day and a few times a week he goes out with his buddies to the bar after work. Bob's hobbies are sports and working on cars. Bob would describe his marriage as being a struggle and his life as being unfulfilling. He has no relationship with God, nor do his wife or children.

Questions: (Don't take Bob past accepting Christ.)

- What does Bob need most from you?
 - He really just needs to be cared for and loved by you (intentional relationship).
- What doesn't Bob need from you?
 - Judgment, Bible beatings.
- What does Bob expect from you? (He knows you are a Christian. How might he refer to you? What words would Bob use to describe a "Christian"?)
 - He might call you a hypocrite, expect judgment, assume motives, i.e., thinks he's just a notch on a Christian belt, may expect you to "sell" him Jesus.
- How do you form a relationship with Bob? (CARE)
 - Invite over for a BBQ, help him with a project, get kids playing together, invite to a sporting event, ask him to **help you** with a project, etc.
- Read Matthew 22:37-40. We are called to love Bob—not to save him. Don't stress out about doing God's part, just love him.
 - From your perspective, what is Bob's greatest need? (Jesus)
 - From Bob's perspective, what might be his greatest needs? (Better job, make more money, better relationships/new relationships, to be happy, etc.)
 - If our ONLY motivation for getting to know Bob is to "sell" him Jesus, what happens to the relationship when he says, "NO"?
 - We need to love Bob through an intentional relationship, be willing to walk through the doors God opens to discuss things of God, and share Christ with him.
- What tensions might Bob experience in regard to forming a relationship with you?
 - He can't be himself, you want to change him, unsure of your motives, doesn't know how to relate to you, etc.

- Why is it so important to consider the tensions Bob might experience?
 - Helps us put ourselves in his shoes—understand his perspective.
 - Helps us overcome obstacles in healthy ways.
 - Helps us anticipate issues and/or behavior.
 - Challenges us to consider the depth of our relationship with others—if we can't figure out their tensions, we probably don't know them very well.
- How much effort are you putting into the relationship compared to Bob—especially in the early stages?
 - You must carry most of the weight in the relationship.
 - Why is this important to consider? (discouragement, frustration, giving up)
- How do you get God into your relationship with Bob (get God into the conversation)? (BEAR)
 - His life has many issues/problems. God will open conversational doors and ministry opportunities. Walk through them.
- How does Bob come to know the Lord through your relationship?
 - You must be willing and able to make the ask—share Christ with him. (See Appendix for helpful resources.)
- You've already identified all of the intentional things you'd be doing with Bob, but what does Bob need to be doing, and what is God's part in all of this?
 - What does Bob need to do in order to have a relationship with you?
 - How is God working on Bob? How does Bob need to respond to God?
 - What is God doing with you in this process? How do you need to respond to God?
- What are the main reasons believers don't have intentional relationships with non-believers and why they don't share Christ with them? Note: Most Christians will die without sharing Christ with one other person. (SHARE)
 - They have a wrong understanding of what that looks like (Bible thumper versus true relationship).
 - Wrong understanding of what sharing Christ means (evangelism versus relationship).
 - Feel they don't know enough (not equipped).
 - Fear of conflict, fight, rejection.
 - Not their job.
 - Selfish (lack of time, motivation, wrong priorities).
- We need to help people understand their role and equip them in the areas they need (see the homework for this session). (DARE)
 - Able to have a relationship (love others).
 - Able to share how they know God is real (what God has done in their life).
 - Able to explain an authentic gospel message.
 - Able to pray with someone.
 - Able to baptize them.
 - Able to continue a discipleship relationship with them.
- Think of the Kingdom impact this would have:

- If you were the only Christian on the face of the earth and you took one year to disciple someone, then you released them to take a year to disciple someone else and you did the same thing with another person, it would only take 34 years to reach the entire population of the world—approximately 6.6 BILLION people—for Jesus Christ! Let's go!
- Think of your role with Bob as being his coach.
 - A coach prepares his players for the game.
 - It's Sunday night. You just shared Christ with Bob, and he made a confession of faith. As Bob's "coach," how do you help him prepare for the game? What is "the game"?
 - His life at home with his wife and kids, at work with his co-workers, his life with friends and other relationships, etc.
 - Start by asking questions.
 - What are you thinking about? What are you worried about? What's your next step?
 - Help him process his next steps.
 - Where do you start as a Christ follower?
 - How do you talk with your wife and kids about what just happened?
 - What will it look like for you to follow Jesus as a husband and father?
 - What to do, what not to do, what are the proper expectations?
 - Reassure him of your commitment to continued relationship. (What would happen if you didn't continue the journey with him?)

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20. We were never called to make a convert. We are called to make disciples. What's the difference?
2. How are evangelism (telling others about Jesus) and discipleship (helping those who respond to Jesus to mature in their faith) two parts of the same thing? What's the danger in thinking of these as two separate things?
3. What are practical ways to be intentional in a relationship with someone who doesn't currently know Jesus?