

2023 | LESSON 1

# DISCIPLE-CYCLE:

## SIMPLIFYING YOUR APPROACH


### THE SIMPLE BEAUTY OF ONE-BY-ONE

In taking all of the previous obstacles listed in the Introduction into consideration, one can come away with the impression that making disciples is almost too difficult to do. But, as mentioned earlier, God's Word gives us both the substance of what it means to follow Jesus and the strategy for how we can help others do the same thing. While this process will start out slowly, if it truly takes root it will begin to move like wildfire and typically mushroom beyond expectation.

This is reflected in the mathematical formula of compound interest. Think of it the following way: If one person commits to disciple three people in one year who will do the same the following year, the progression might look like the following:

YEAR 1 = 3 PEOPLE  
YEAR 2 = 9 PEOPLE  
YEAR 3 = 27 PEOPLE  
YEAR 4 = 81 PEOPLE  
YEAR 5 = 243 PEOPLE  
YEAR 6 = 729 PEOPLE  
YEAR 7 = 2,187 PEOPLE  
YEAR 8 = 6,561 PEOPLE  
YEAR 9 = 19,683 PEOPLE  
YEAR 10 = 59,049 PEOPLE





Obviously, this is an idealized version of what could happen. Nor does it take into account the sovereignty of God in salvation. This is merely an illustrative picture rather than a prescriptive model.

But, it also does not consider the possibility that the same people who did it once will keep on doing it again. Mind blowing, isn't it? As the saying goes, "We overestimate what can be done in a year and underestimate what can be done in ten."

Many pastors might look at a fraction of this projection and secretly see this kind of growth as an opportunity to build larger buildings or grander ministries.

But, the ultimate goal is not growing larger in your ministry, it is going broader in your mission of seeing more and more people come to know and follow Christ to the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:15).





## A NEW/OLD PARADIGM

If this is possible, what can we do to ensure that we align everything we do under this goal? The good news is that we don't have to come up with a brilliant plan. We just need to contextualize the brilliant plan Jesus has already created.

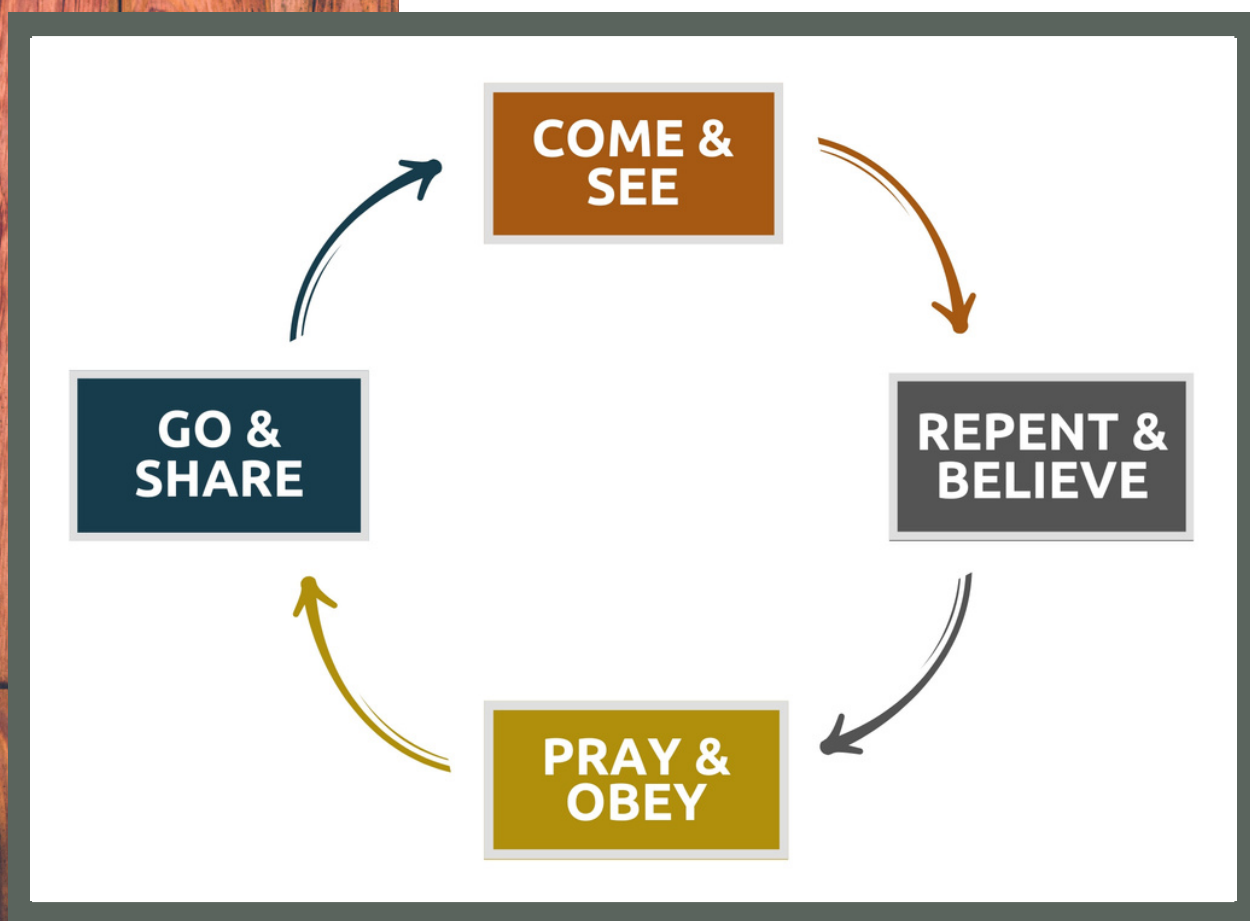
The first step to do this is to insure that people understand and integrate the Gospel into their daily lives. To be and make disciples, we need to make sure that we are Gospel-centered, which is the second of our five core values that undergirds the Disciple-Cycle process. To be gospel-centered infers that those who follow Jesus live out of the completed work of Jesus' perfect life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection. In other words, both our identity and our activity should flow out of who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

This is so important that the Bible study you will be using to anchor people in these fundamental spiritual realities is called "The Good News." These lessons provide a starting point that a non-Christian can understand or a return to the basics that can bring a Christian back to a place of joy and renewal. This is what Disciple-Cycle is all about. As we have said before, it is the means to becoming a disciple and the method for how we make disciples.

When we talk about the means of discipleship we are saying that it is an ongoing cycle of growth that any disciple should follow. The reason this is important is because sometimes we run into a "discipleship-disconnect" whereby we teach a study or follow a particular model, but it doesn't reflect what we have learned or are learning.

This causes us to be very impersonal and mechanical in our approach. In this disconnect, the gathering of information or even the perfection of a skill gets overemphasized, divorcing us from the living dynamic of walking with a risen, present Savior and Lord. The Disciple-Cycle counters this tendency by being deeply anchored in a process that every person can follow because it represents the ongoing journey of following Jesus based on what Jesus commanded his first disciples to do.

With regards to methodology, the disciple-maker can use this model to reflect upon what stage of growth the disciple is encountering and coach them to see what needs to happen next. The disciple can also share what they are learning, thus reducing the tendency to force a top-down model of disciple making where the disciple-maker comes across as some type of expert rather than a fellow traveler. Based on these foundational ideas, here is a summary of each of these stages:





# COME & SEE

When Jesus first began his public ministry, two of John the Baptist's disciples were standing near him when he saw Jesus and exclaimed, "Behold the lamb of God!" Those two disciples then started following Jesus (evidently at a safe distance). When he noticed he turned around and asked them, "What are you seeking?" They then inquired about where he was living and he replied, "Come and see" (John 1:35-39). This was the initial invitation that paved the way for the rest of the men and women who would become followers of Jesus.

Because of this invitation we can say that everything about being a disciple begins and ends with knowing Jesus (John 17:3). Whether we are just being initially exposed to the claims of Christ or have been walking with him a long time, our faith is founded and fueled by this relational dynamic. Colossians 2:6-7 says *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."* We received Christ by grace through faith. The Holy Spirit drew us to Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel and we realized our overwhelming need and his incredible provision (Eph. 2:1-9). Our identity therefore is permanently established in Christ. This creates humble confidence and renewing thankfulness in our ongoing journey with him.

With this in mind it is important to remember that the focus of the Gospel is not a message or a doctrine. The focus of the Gospel is on a living person who is both God and man and is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Luke 22:69; Hebrews 8:1). He died and rose on our behalf that our sins might be forgiven and that we would be reconciled to our Creator (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). We therefore never outgrow the need to get a fresher and deeper understanding of Jesus.

Paul reflected this mindset when he said in 2 Corinthians 3:18 *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* Among other incredible things this means that when we, by faith, through the Scriptures, and under the guidance of the Spirit, gaze into the glory of Christ, we become more like Jesus.

But not only does every disciple need to continually come back to the source of their faith, every disciple maker should also be able to say "Spend time with me and come and see what it is like to walk with Jesus." Discipleship is meant to be a life-on-life enterprise. It is not a class or even technically a process. It is a journey between individuals as one person pours their life into another to help them become more like Christ.



This dynamic was seen not only in Jesus' life but also in Paul's. He never traveled alone. He was always investing his life in others, even when he was in prison (Phil. 1:1; Titus 3:15). He not only preached in synagogues but also in people's homes (Acts 20:18-20). This was such a consistent pattern in Paul's life that he reminded the Thessalonians that because of the solid example of his missionary band's lives that they "became imitators of us and the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:5-6).

Think of that. You can actually have a person imitate some Christ-like attribute you exhibit. When I was a kid, I had a plastic mower and I followed behind my dad as he carved rows of newly mown grass. I have a treasured picture of me at two doing that very thing. He was such a fine man that still today at sixty-two years of age I think about his example as I seek to love my wife, our kids and grandkids, or make decisions on how to spend my money.

But not only are people impacted by your discipling of them, you are impacted by their lives. Paul went on to reflect the power of this interpersonal connection later in the same letter when he likened it to the way a nursing mother tends to a beloved child (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). I don't know of a more powerful connection on earth than a mother nursing a baby. We could say that it is almost a sacred, holy thing where one person is giving life-supporting nourishment to another. Neuroscientists now know that certain hormones and neurochemicals are released in both mother and child during the nursing process that creates a deep and lasting bond.

This is so powerful that when God sought to communicate his everlasting commitment to his people that he said through the prophet Isaiah that even if it were possible for a nursing mother to forget and forsake her child he would not (Isaiah 49:14-16). In similar fashion, when I think of every person I have ever discipled, often tears of deep gratitude come to my eyes. I may not have seen a person in decades but their impact upon me is still felt. You cannot disciple another person without your life being enhanced. But if you are not moved by the memory of those you have shared the Scriptures with, chances are you really haven't discipled them.

As a person grows in grace and truth they can say in the same fashion that Paul did, to the Philippian church, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." I know what some of you might be thinking, "Yeah, right. There is no way I could have the courage to say that." But if you know Christ and have experienced his goodness you have something to share. That is the secret sauce (if there is such a thing in this instance) of Jesus' way of discipling others.

In summary of this first step of discipling another, we could say that it is both a joy and a huge responsibility. Perfection is not required, but authenticity and commitment are essential. Your walk with Christ has to be real and growing if you are to disciple another. For example, people will eventually see any level of hypocrisy in your life if they get to know you.

You will also have to invest a part of yourself on behalf of another. This is no antiseptic, mechanical acquisition of knowledge or skills. The person you are discipling gets to know the real you. They not only invite you into their lives, you invite them into yours. Ultimately, you are not the hero of the story. Your main responsibility is to point them to Jesus who is the author and finisher of their faith (Hebrews 12:1-3).



# REPENT & BELIEVE

Once we get a glimpse of the brilliance and beauty of Jesus, we recognize how different we are from him. When this happens, we are convicted of our sin. How then should we respond? This is very important. In fact, herein lies the heart of the Gospel. The right response is that we should repent and believe. This was John the Baptist's preparatory message for the coming Messiah, it was Jesus' announcement of the coming of God's Kingdom when he inaugurated his public ministry, and it was the early church's simple proclamation to both Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 2:38; 11:18).

Obviously, when we first heard and understood the message of the Gospel, we realized that turning from our sin and believing that Jesus' death and resurrection brought complete forgiveness and provided us with a brand-new identity as God's child. But is that all there is to it? No. In fact, we need to keep "gospel-ling" ourselves the rest of our lives. This means that we need to continually repent of our sins and believe in who Jesus is and what he has done on our behalf.

With regards to repentance, we know that it not only means to renounce our sin but to even change the way we look at sin. In fact, the word repentance means "to change your mind." The conversion of our thoughts and false beliefs about life is not an overnight process, but requires a lifelong diligence to walk in the full freedom Christ has purchased for us (Galatians 5:1).

As a disciple-maker you are to model to the person you are investing in that repentance is not what a bad person does, it's a way of life that a follower of Jesus regularly practices. You have to show them that it's not as much a requirement, but a gift that God has given us for our ongoing transformation (Romans 2:4). You are to encourage people to repent by repenting yourself. This requires you to reflect a liberating humility about your own past (1 Timothy 1:12-17). What you are modeling is not only liberating humility but also resolute honesty. This helps to create within the church a culture of infectious authenticity and healthy accountability (1 John 1:5-10).

On the other hand, to keep believing means that we continually put our hope and confidence in Jesus and his perfect payment for our sins (Galatians 6:14). The way we live out this confidence in discipleship is a daily embracing of the way of the cross (Luke 9:23-24). The way of the cross reminds us of the truth that we are not saved by anything we have done. It also re-centers and encourages us to the reality that it is the power of the cross that keeps delivering us (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The way of the cross also reminds us that the Christian life is one of faith (Hebrews 11:1-3, 6). We will never experience all that God has for us without faith. Many Christians experience mundane lives because they are locked within their own limited views of life and have failed to trust Jesus in any circumstance (Mark 4:39-41).

The Gospel is not just about rejecting what is wrong, but also about embracing the new way of life that Jesus has created for us.

For the disciple-maker, this means that you coach your disciple to integrate faith into every aspect of their lives. You help them think about the daily implications of the Gospel for their lives. For example, you might ask, "How does being totally forgiven free you to live the life you are called to live?" This type of question reminds the disciple that daily believing in the Gospel opens our eyes to the adventure of faith.





# PRAY & OBEY

Repentance of our sin and faith in Jesus leads us to want to follow him. Following him is a living, growing, dynamic relationship. This means that Christianity is not so much a set of rules to obey as it is adopting a way of life that reflects the character, ways and purposes of Jesus.

What first keeps us centered and sane in this journey is learning to become a person of prayer. Jesus was a man of prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 11:1-11). His relationship with the Father gave him the insight he needed to do the ministry he was called to do (John 5:16-23). His prayer life made a profound impact upon the disciples, and it was this example that they carried with them as the church was launched (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-14).

In similar fashion, prayer moves us from simply following biblical principles to throwing our whole hearts into knowing and following Jesus (Psalm 138:1-3). When we pray, we learn the invaluable lesson of abiding or communing with God (John 15:1-5). Prayer is also the pathway to spiritual power (Acts 4:31). Conversely, prayerlessness is a quick detour downward towards ineffectual living and impotent ministry (Mark 9:14-29).

Because of the essentiality of prayer, you will need to be a person that is passionate about this spiritual discipline. It doesn't mean that you have to be perfect in this or be at some monkish-level of spiritual maturity. What it does mean is that you have experienced the benefits of being a person of prayer and therefore have life-lessons you can draw upon.

It will be important to even spend time together in prayer so that they can learn how they can use their own "voice" in adoration, thanksgiving and intercession towards God and don't have to use a special vocabulary or access secret knowledge to be effectual in it (James 4:16-17).



If you are a person who learns from and leans on God in prayer you will realize that obedience is fundamental to being a disciple. To follow him means to do what he commands us to do. As important as feelings are to our lives, when push comes to shove the bottom line is to do what he says, regardless of how we feel (Matthew 7:21-21). A person who claims to follow Jesus but never obeys him is self-deceived. Obedience to Jesus is a fundamental indicator that you know him (John 3:36). In fact, it is an essential component of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Not only that, obedience is the pathway to intimacy (John 14:23). The sense of the presence of the Lord in your life is not only confirmation that you know him, but that your fellowship with him is substantial. If you really want to know God deeply there is no shortcut. Obedience can bring a comforting, overwhelming experience of God's love and care.

Finally, obedience leads to empowerment to do the mission God has given you (Acts 6:1-7). If there is a block in your effectiveness, you should look at your life to see if there is a besetting sin in your life caused by a lack of obedience to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:10-35).





# GO & SHARE

The final aspect of the Discipleship Cycle is Go & Share. Here, a person realizes that the call to follow Christ is a missionary call. We are not to sit on our spiritual assets. We are beckoned to go from our Jerusalem to the ends of the earth sharing with the broken and the lost the hope that is in Jesus (1 Peter 3:14-16). This means we need to be comfortable and even sometimes uncomfortable in sharing the Gospel with people. We are to tell them how Jesus has changed our lives. We are called to challenge them to consider who Jesus is, what he calls people to do, and then repent and believe the Gospel.

Witnessing is not merely taking them through the “Romans Road” (although sharing the Gospel in its entirety is crucial). It is daily and weekly in the power of the Holy Spirit testifying to the manifest goodness of God in your life. We should, with our own personalities and stories, reflect the flavoring and revealing realities of God in our daily lives (Matt 5:13-16).

As you can already see, the Disciple-Cycle then starts all over again with us pointing people to Jesus. This is the repetition that brings replication. To put it another way, as followers of Jesus, there is a clear connection between how we grow as disciples and how we make disciples.



# QUESTIONS

**1. What are the differences between a one-by-one approach to discipleship and a large-group approach to discipleship?**

**2. How does the “Disciple-Cycle” model challenge your ideas about the means and methods of making disciples?**

**3. Which aspects of the “Disciple-Cycle” represent missing elements in your personal relationship with Jesus? What has been the impact?**

**4. Which aspects of the “Disciple-Cycle” represent missing elements in your strategy for making disciples in your church? What has been the impact?**

**5. What are your next steps to take to incorporate these missing elements back into your strategy for making disciples?**