

LIFESCHOOL

FOR LEADERS. FOR FAMILIES. FOR YOU.



THE DISCIPLESHIP ENVIRONMENT OF JESUS

Discipleship for Jesus was never a series of curriculum or a set of events and classes that he asked his disciples to attend. Today, those kinds of things may teach what Jesus taught, but they don't create an experience where people learn to obey all that he commanded in every area of life. A gospel-centered community living together on Jesus' mission must be the context for discipleship.

Life on life. Life in community. Life on mission.

Discipleship is an all of life apprenticeship led by Jesus himself. In order to make disciples of Jesus, who in turn know how to make more disciples, we must pay close attention to the experience and environment that Jesus provided his disciples.

It is critical to keep in mind that all discipleship must be:

Spirit Led

Discipleship is the process of moving from unbelief to belief, concerning what is true of God, and now us, in every area of life. It is the Holy Spirit that draws us to the Father, reminds of the truth and transforms us into God's family of missionary servants. The Spirit calls, equips and sends us out to bear fruit for his glory, through his power.

The Holy Spirit is the primary discipler of people.

We will never make disciples apart from being in submission to and in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Ask yourself: What would it look like to disciple others with greater submission to and dependence on the Holy Spirit?

Study these verses to learn more: Gal 3:1-4, 5:16-26; Jn 14:15-20, 16:7-15, 1 Cor. 2:10-14, Rom 8:5-14,

Gospel Saturated

In the New Testament we often see Jesus lead the disciples to reflect and apply truth based on experience. In the course of everyday events and conversations, he showed them how being a part of his kingdom gives a new perspective on all of life, changing everything.

The gospel must permeate the discipling environment. It is the good news for every area of our life; not just good news about our afterlife. The gospel answers every problem; changes fear to faith and gives us the motivation to submit all of life to the Lordship of Jesus. In him alone we find our security, significance, approval, joy and satisfaction.

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Ask yourself: Do casual conversations in community often go to the gospel? How can you help saturate the discipling environment with the gospel and help others grow in their gospel-fluency as well?

Study these verses to learn more: Eph 4:15; Gal 2:14; John 14:6; Heb 3:13; 2 Cor 4:13; 1 Thess 5:11

Community Based

Jesus himself embodied all truth, and yet chose to call a very diverse group of people to live with and follow him in community. The disciples learned an extraordinary amount from watching and listening to Jesus, and then talked, questioned and lived out what they learned together.

None of us are perfectly Jesus on our own; it takes a Spirit led community to represent him and function fully as his body. We need each other's various gifts, experiences and perspectives to draw us into a deeper understanding of the gospel. Character qualities like love, compassion, sacrifice, and generosity are more likely to be integrated into a person's life in the context of relationship.

Ask yourself: Does everyone in your community see themselves as a vital component to everyone else's discipleship process?

Study these verses to learn more: Matt 20:17-28; John 17:20-26; Luke 9:1-20; Eph 4: 4-13; 1 Corinthians 14:26-33

Individually Tailored

Though we most often find Jesus spending time with the disciples in community, we also see him speaking specifically into the lives of individual followers at different times and in unique ways.

In addition to the need for a consistent and dynamic group environment, discipleship must have a personal nature as well. Each individual in our community has different needs, challenges, passions, and spiritual gifts. Their discipleship will require personalized attention in addition to the things they do and learn together.

In the same way that parents view the development of each of their children individually, discipleship must also focus on the unique needs of the person.

Ask yourself: Is someone giving regular and personal care to each member of your community based on their needs and personality?

Study these verses to learn more: Matt 14:28-31, 16:15-19, 26:36-38; Lk 9:28, 22:31-34; 2 Tim 1:13; 3:10-17

Holistic

It's obvious from the teaching and experiences Jesus had with the disciples that he was committed to developing them holistically; he desired to bring every area of their lives under his Kingdom rule and reign.

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Discipleship involves caring for the whole life of a person. Every part of our life needs the gospel, not just the “spiritual” things like Bible study, prayer and sin issues. How we steward our time, jobs, money, relationships, entertainment, health/body etc. must all be transformed by the gospel for God’s glory.

Ask yourself: What areas of discipleship and “all of life” care do we need to give greater attention to in our missional community? How can you begin to disciple one another more holistically?

Study these verses to learn more: Matt 5:1-12, 6:1-4, 6:19-34; Luke 5:5-11, 6:37-42

Frequent and Long-term

Jesus invested three years of his life into his disciples before he sent them to minister and lead on their own. During that time he spent an incredible amount of time with them: often with all twelve, sometimes with a few, occasionally one-to-one. Life together with Jesus was not just a weekly meeting.

Discipleship is not fast; it takes a lot of time, commitment and sacrificial love for one another. We must be with those we are discipling frequently and expect to walk with them for a long period of time. We would never imagine that we could parent our children in a couple hours each week and expect them to be healthy and mature adults. Discipleship is much the same.

Ask yourself: Are we spending enough time together, seeing and experiencing life as a community, to the point that true life-change can happen?

Study these verses to learn more: Matt 4:18-23, 9:35-38; Mark 3:14, 10:32; Luke 8:1; John 6:60-71

Modeled and Experienced

Most of the time Jesus spent with his disciples was in the normal rhythms of life as they ate, traveled, taught and served others. While there were times when he taught in more formal settings, it was his consistent example of love, generosity, encouragement, prayer, etc. that probably had the greatest impact on their lives.

Jesus modeled the life he wanted his disciples to go and live.

We all learn much more when we see something modeled and experience it for ourselves compared to just hearing it taught. Disciples need to see and experience a gospel-centered life modeled for them in the day-to-day lives of mature saints.

Ask yourself: Do those in my community have access to every area of my life so they can see and experience the gospel at work? How can we encourage others in the community to live out more of what they see modeled in our lives?

Study these verses to learn more: Matt 8, 9, 14:13-21; Luke 5:12-13, 8:26-56, 13:10-17, 14:1-6; 17:11-14

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Organized and Organic

Jesus often spent times teaching at the temple and synagogues, and he regularly participated in annual feasts and traditions. But he also trained his followers in the moments that occurred along the road, at a casual meal or in chance conversations that would come up in life. The discipleship model of Jesus included both organized activities and organic opportunities.

Just like our natural, healthy family life contains both of these elements, we will need to nurture our extended families in the organized and organic parts of life in community. Healthy community life will include planned out events and reoccurring activity, but it is also filled with spontaneous and unplanned opportunities throughout each week.

If your missional community is only doing organized things—event to event—it will grow stale and be unfulfilling. If your group is only interested in the organic, unplanned “hanging out” together, it will rarely be on mission or make mature disciples.

Ask yourself: Which do you most naturally prefer: organized events or organic interactions? How can you begin to grow in both these practices?

Study these verses to learn more: Matt 5:1-12; Mark 14:12-18, 22; Luke 10:25-28, 38-42, 12:1-11, 14:1-4

Others Focused

Jesus placed a high value on service and evangelism to those who were not yet his followers, especially to those in great need. Jesus was consistently exposing the disciples to different kinds of people, in different kinds of places, with different kinds of needs. He often placed the disciples in situations where they could learn to love and serve “the least of these” by serving alongside him.

Spiritual growth is often more significant when we serve others outside our own close circle and those who are in great need. It's very important for these things to be practiced frequently, so that they become part of a person's lifestyle, rather than a project that they participate in on occasion.

Ask yourself: How can you make mission-minded service a larger part of your missional community's life together? What can you begin to do weekly or monthly as a service to those in need around you?

Study these verses to learn more: Matthew 8:1-3, 8:14-17, 10:5-8; Luke 9:10-17, 18:35-43

Note: I want to gratefully acknowledge my brother and partner in the gospel, Todd Morr, for his original thoughts and outline on the environment that Jesus made disciples in. His fingerprints are all over and throughout this.