

## Ross Road Community Church Making Disciples

*The following article is intended to lay a foundation for the intentional making of disciples at Ross Road Community Church. It is recommended as the first module of study for all LEAD participants. Guiding questions for personal reflection and discussion with others are provided in the right-hand margin. The margin is also an ideal place to jot down personal thoughts and questions.*

The mission of Ross Road Community Church is **helping people find and follow Jesus**. These six words can be expressed in two—**make disciples**. This mission implies that our *central* ministry focus—what we do day in and day out to accomplish our mission—must be **equipping disciple-making disciples**.

All of this sounds simple enough, and yet, in order best to devote ourselves to our central ministry focus and thus to fulfill our mission, we need to deepen our understanding of what a disciple is, how disciples are made, and how we equip each other at Ross Road Community Church for this vital work. The following questions and answers are intended to lay a foundation for further conversation towards the ultimate end of making more and better disciples.

### Why do we make disciples?

It is important that we not only know the answer to this question but that we also develop deep conviction about how important it is. **We make disciples because, before Jesus returned to the Father's presence, this is the principal thing He told us to do with our lives.** As such, it is also the principal thing Jesus will ask us if we *have done* when we see Him next. This makes making disciples extremely important!

Jesus' instructions about making disciples are recorded in Matthew 28:18-20.

*16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*

*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

We must be crystal clear that Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:18-20 are His *command* to us. For good reason, Christians have labeled this command as “The Great Commission.” When Jesus prefaced His commission with a claim to *“all authority in heaven and on earth,”* its profound significance was made clear. The title is also appropriate because *“make disciples”* is in the imperative, meaning it is clearly a command, not merely a suggestion. And the title, The Great Commission, is appropriate because Jesus promised us His presence, as we obey His commission, until He returns—*“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

It might appear that Jesus is commanding several things in the Great Commission: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. A closer look at the grammar of the original language of the New Testament (Greek) indicates that there is only one principal command in the commission. A single word in Greek, μαθητεύω (math-ayt-yoo-oh) meaning “make disciples” is the only verb in the imperative. The other three verbs are participles. (Participles in English are verbs ending in “ing.”) These three participles pick up imperative force from *“make disciples,”* helping to explain what making disciples entails. Making disciples involves *“going”* to where people are, starting with the people around you and extending to *“all nations.”* It also involves *“baptizing,”* because that is the physical action by which new disciples indicate that they are signing up to be Jesus’ followers. And it involves *“teaching”* them to actually do everything that Jesus commanded.

Knowing that making disciples is the principal thing Jesus has commanded us to do with our lives and knowing in broad terms what that entails, we need to explore what a disciple is. We can’t make something unless we know what we are making.

## **What is a disciple?**

When Jesus’ disciples heard Him tell them to make disciples, they understood that He was instructing them

Does the Great Commission feel like a command given to you personally or does it feel like a command given to others?  
Why?  
Why not?  
What difference would it make if we saw it as a command given to all Jesus’ followers to accomplish together?

to multiply themselves. Two or three years earlier, He had enrolled them as His disciples. Now He was instructing them to enroll others, helping them become what He had helped them to become.

Put most simply, a disciple is a follower or a learner. Follower implies following someone. A disciple then is the learner in a pupil-to-teacher relationship. Just as each of the disciples who heard Jesus' commission were in such a relationship with Him, He expected them to bring others into such relationships. Jesus' disciples knew exactly what He meant because they had experienced it themselves.

A pupil-to-teacher relationship with Jesus means getting to know Him, accepting what He says as true and obeying His instructions because He is the teacher and the disciple is the learner. But there is more than learning going on; there is also relationship happening.

We can better understand what the disciples understood about Jesus' command if we recall how Jesus had enrolled them as His followers. Matthew 4:19 records how Jesus recruited Simon and Andrew. He recruited the rest of the twelve in similar ways.

*And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

Matthew 4:19 *ESV*

What did Jesus' invitation entail? He invited them to "*follow*" Him, which as we have just noted included learning from Him as they got to know Him and submitted to His authority as their teacher. He also invited them into change: "*I will make you....*" And He invited them to participate in His mission as "*fishers of men.*" From this simple invitation, we can arrive at a definition of a disciple of Jesus.

**A disciple is a follower of Jesus  
who is getting to know Him,  
is being changed by Him,  
and is committing to His mission.<sup>1</sup>**

What difference does it make to a holistic understanding of being a disciple if we leave out any of these three critical pieces?

"Getting to know Him?"

"Being changed by Him?"

"Committing to His mission?"

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is drawn largely from the thought of Jim Putnam, the author of several books on discipling. See "Discipleshift: Key Take-Aways From Jim Putman's Relational Discipleship Book" <http://robcezck.com/discipleshift-key-take-aways-from-jim-putmans-new-book/> accessed on July 14, 2016.

## What does it mean to make a disciple?

To make a disciple is to do just what Jesus did. He approached people who didn't know Him and invited them to be in relationship with Him, to be changed by Him, and join Him in His mission. Some of them had some information about Him and even a bit of interaction with Him prior to His invitation. His invitation to them was to take it a step further by making a commitment to Him.

When Simon and Andrew left their nets to follow Jesus, He had already made them His disciples, but that was just the beginning. There was a lot of growing and changing that still needed to occur. And it would be some time before they even understood Jesus' mission, let alone join up to help fulfill it. Yet as they followed Him, they grew in intimacy with Him and in character within themselves as they joined His mission team as His apprentices. Later, when Jesus gave these apprentices the Great Commission, He was instructing them to enroll others, teaching them until they too were actually doing everything He commanded.

This realization prompts us to define disciple making in this way.

**Disciple making begins with helping people far from God begin a relationship with Jesus and it continues with helping them to know Him better, to cooperate with the changes He is making in their character, and to join Him in His mission.**

Put differently, disciple making begins before a potential disciple has found Jesus and it continues lifelong as the disciple increasingly enjoys Jesus, becomes more like Him and learns to participate with Him in His mission. Disciple-making's definition is spelled out simply in our mission: "to help people and find and follow Jesus."

Recognizing the broad scope of making disciples is necessary to correct a misunderstanding that grew up several generations ago. Well-intentioned Christian leaders separated evangelism from discipleship. Evangelism was aimed at non-Christians, while discipleship was aimed at Christians. This division of the whole scope of making disciples into two, only one of

Have you personally been affected by the artificial separation of disciple making into evangelism and discipleship?

How?

What difference does it make for you when you view disciple making as helping people far from Jesus find Him as Saviour?

Who are the people who don't know Jesus yet whom you could be discipling?

Similarly, what difference does it make when you view disciple making as a lifelong pursuit?

Who are the people whom you are assisting in their spiritual growth?

which was labeled discipleship, obscured the force of what Jesus meant when He commanded us to make disciples.

Not surprisingly, many churches have devoted far more of their energies, resources, and ministries to building up those who have already trusted in Jesus than they have to enrolling as His followers those who don't yet know Him. In addition, the understanding grew up that "being disciplined" meant being taken through a curriculum covering basic Christian beliefs. While such a curriculum may be quite valuable in the life of a new Christian—and any Christian, for that matter—it is too narrow of a definition of making disciples. It leaves out the pre-Christian phase and tends to minimize the lifelong learning and growing aspects of discipling. Although not necessarily so, it might also lean too heavily towards learning truth and not heavily enough on knowing Jesus, being changed by Him, and engaging in His mission.

### **What are the stages in the life of a disciple?**

Since the scope of making disciples is indeed broad, we legitimately wonder about stages in the lives of disciples and potential disciples. Certainly those who don't yet accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord are at a different stage than those who do. Similarly, those who have grown significantly in their relationship with Jesus and His transformation in their lives are at different stages than those who are just beginning with Him. And, since there are different stages in the life of a disciple, it stands to reason that discipling individuals at these different stages require different methods and materials. So, what might these stages be?

The stages in a life of a disciple can be illustrated in various ways. The REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey offers an approach that defines potential and actual disciples in four stages that are differentiated by their proximity to Jesus.

Exploring Christ➔  
 Growing in Christ➔  
 Close to Christ➔  
 Christ-Centred

What stage best describes you currently?

If you have moved beyond the Exploring Christ stage, what influences prompted you to begin growing in Christ?

Would you say you are currently growing in Christ or do you seem to be stuck, not making forward progress?

The following statements capture the essence of each of these stages.

- **Exploring Christ:** “I believe in God, but I am not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life.”
- **Growing in Christ:** “I believe in Jesus and am working on what it means to get to know Him better.”
- **Close to Christ:** “I feel really close to Christ and depend on Him for guidance.”
- **Christ-Centred:** “My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides me in everything I do.”

Whatever the system we use to help us picture progress in discipling, it is not only clear that different stages require different resources for continued growth but also that disciple making has a goal.

## What is the goal of disciple making?

In His Word, God has identified His goal for humans—and therefore His goal for disciples of Jesus—as threefold. **First, God wants disciples to know Him personally.** He made this abundantly clear through the prophet Jeremiah (9:23-24), when He told him,

*This is what the Lord says:  
 “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom  
 or the strong boast of their strength  
 or the rich boast of their riches,  
 but let the one who boasts boast about this:  
 that they have the understanding to know me,  
 that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness,  
 justice and righteousness on earth,  
 for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.*

Learning to know and enjoy Him was one of the reasons why Jesus selected twelve apostles “...that they might be with Him...” (Mark 3:13). Furthermore, He made

If you are growing,  
what is fuelling that  
growth?

If you are stuck, what  
do you think it will  
take to get you  
unstuck?

Before reading the next  
section, take a moment  
to answer the question,  
“What are God’s goals for  
all human beings?

sure that they knew that eternal life is knowing “*the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom He had sent*” (John 17:3).

**Second, God wants disciples to become like Jesus.** Numerous passages of scripture identify Christ-likeness as a critical part of the disciples’ goal.

- To Jesus’ original disciples, Jesus’ invitation “Follow *me*,” Jesus implied that they would become like *Him* as they learned from Him as their master.
- To the Ephesians (3:19), Paul described the goal as “*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...*”
- To the Galatians (4:19), Paul identified the goal as “*Christ is formed in you.*”
- To the Romans (8:29), Paul said that, for those who love Him, God works together all things for the good of their becoming “*...conformed to the image of his Son...*”

**Thirdly, God’s goal for all disciples is that they would be on mission with Him.** The Apostle Paul, for example, along with many other men and women in scripture, defined himself as God’s servant. When telling his shipmates that he had heard from God in the midst of their life-threatening storm, Paul described God as, “*...the God to whom I belong and whom I serve...*” So it is that every disciple is one who belongs to God and serves in His mission.

It is not coincidental that these three priorities are each referenced in our working definition of a disciple. **A disciple is a follower of Jesus who is getting to know Him, is being changed by Him, and is committing to His mission.**

To understand better this definition—and God’s desires for all humans—each of these three facets must be explored more deeply.

## **What is it like to be continually getting to know Jesus better?**

When Jesus chose the twelve disciples to be His apostles, He did so in order “*that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons*” (Mark 3:24-25). The first priority was first to be with Him. These twelve men—along with others, including women—were privileged to

Since God’s goals for human beings are the same as His goals for Jesus’ disciples, does it follow that all disciple making is about helping people—both those far from God and those already in relationship with Him—to become more whole as human beings?

How so?

How does this impact your motivation as a disciple maker?

be with Jesus day in and day out. Slowly they got to know and understand Him. It was a challenge for Jesus and a challenge for them. One minute, they were able to understand who Jesus is and what He is about—and the next minute, they were caught up in human concerns counter to Jesus' person and mission (Matthew 16:13-23).

Notwithstanding, gradually they grasped Jesus' heart and learned to join Him in taking up their crosses in order to follow Him (Luke 9:23). And their getting to know Jesus did not stop with His death, resurrection, and ascension. Even though He was no longer with them physically, He promised on their last night together before His arrest, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you"* (John 14:18). That same night, He called them His friends, giving as evidence that He had confided in them everything He had learned from His Father (John 15:15). He also told them that night, as He instructed them how to remain in His love, even after He was gone, *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete"* (John 15:1-17). And then, in the commission He gave them just prior to His ascension, He promised, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). For them, as for us, getting to know and enjoy Jesus more and more would be a lifelong pursuit.

Before anything else, being Jesus' disciple means the enjoyment of knowing Him. It may be that when we describe experiences we have with Jesus as spiritual disciplines, we make getting to know Jesus sound grim. To be healthy disciples, we must not see it this way. Consistency in Bible reading, prayer, scripture memory, silence, fasting, worship, and other spiritual growth activities sometimes requires discipline, just as ensuring that we reserve time for friends and family takes discipline. Yet healthy disciples focus on enjoying Jesus, not merely on faithfulness in spiritual activities. Healthy disciples also learn to enjoy Jesus in the midst of any and all life's many activities.

## **What changes does Jesus make in His disciples?**

We know that Jesus accepts us just as we are when we come to Him seeking reconciliation with God. We don't have to clean ourselves up first. It is also true that

If we are not careful we can make the mistake of thinking that growth in Jesus is mostly about knowing *about* Him. It's more than that; it is about knowing *Him*. What is the difference?

Under what circumstances and in what activities do you most enjoy Jesus?



Jesus loves us too much to leave us the way we are when we first come to Him—or even in our present state after we’ve known Him for a long time. We not only need forgiveness and reconciliation with God; we also need ongoing healing in our brokenness. In truth, Jesus wants to make us more like Him in our every dimension.

Being like Jesus is truly multi-dimensional. In Luke 2:52, we learn that from a child “*Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.*” With this realization, we might conceive of discipling as taking us beyond our visible world with its three dimensions into a world of at least five-dimensions.

Jesus wants to produce growth in us in all of these five dimensions:

- **Being**—Being a God-honouring person from the inside out—in our soul, our character.
- **Relating**—Relating healthily with God and people.
- **Knowing**—Understanding ourselves, God’s Word, and all sorts of knowledge and wisdom relevant to our daily lives. Growing in our understanding of who God is, who I am, and what I am to do with my life.<sup>2</sup>
- **Doing**—Living a life that pleases God in action and mission.
- **Feeling**—Experiencing and managing a full range of healthy, God-given emotions.

Since change involves the unknown, many of us may be afraid of the changes that God wants to make in our lives. Yet, although we know changes are sometimes costly, we need not be afraid of them. As we change to become disciples of Jesus and then ever-better disciples, we become better, healthier and even happier people.

We must not forget the change that Jesus promised his first disciples. He had said to them, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19 *ESV*). While

How do you think that Jesus might want to change you for the better?

Of which of these five dimensions are you most conscious?

Of which least conscious?

Are one or more of these dimensions under-developed in your life?

What do you think Jesus is doing or wants to do right now to change that?

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<sup>2</sup> “Three defining questions for the journey: Who is God? Who am I? What am I to do with my life? We never grow out of these questions along the way of following Jesus. Rather we grow into them.” Robert Loane, Randy D. Reese, *Growing Up: A Lifelong Journey*, (VantagePoint<sup>3</sup>, 2008), p. 10.

we all want to become better people in our character, we might be less ready to join Jesus in His mission. To be on mission with Jesus necessitates reevaluating our life's priorities. If our primary mission is to live a comfortable life, to have a lot of fun, to be liked by friends, to travel, to be successful in business, or to excel in our career, we will need to experience a significant value shift to make our primary mission in life Jesus' mission. This does not mean that we cannot experience some of these other goals, but it does mean that we begin to view them as serving Jesus' mission, not taking its place. A closer look at Jesus' mission is vital for us.

## **What is Jesus' mission?**

The mission of Jesus, as the Son of God, is that of the eternal, triune God: restoring all creation to its original, intended good. This has been the unwavering purpose of God's activity throughout human history.

Jesus proclaimed this mission when He stood before the synagogue in Nazareth, declaring through the words of the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1-2).

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

As the Gospel writer Mark (1:14-15) described it, Jesus "[proclaimed] the good news of God. 'The time has come.... The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

Since all creation can only be restored to its original, intended good when Jesus is King and since Jesus came as King to restore God's kingdom, we must know what the kingdom is. God's kingdom is where God reigns. As King, God's original design, as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2, was that humans enjoy healthy, harmonious relationship with Him, within themselves, with each other, and with creation itself. Sadly, each of these relationships has been damaged by our human decision, first expressed by Adam and Eve, to violate God's will.

But Jesus came as King to set right what has been damaged, that is, *“to reconcile to [God] himself all things, whether on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross”* (Colossians 1:20). God’s kingdom, then, is where all things are reconciled to God, restored through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the mission into which Jesus invites us. He desires not only to reign *in* us but also *through* us. Jesus said, *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom”* (Luke 12:32). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has done the critical work, yet there is much work for us to do to proclaim the good news, to draw people to Jesus, and to promote healing in broken relationships. Therefore, committing to Jesus’ mission is to commit to the work of reconciliation, setting things right. Paul is explicit about our place in this mission in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

Jesus’ mission, the mission into which He invites us, involves at its core acting as Christ’s ambassadors, representing Him as we seek to help others get right with Him. Yet His mission is so broad as to include working for reconciliation within ourselves as individuals, between one another as fellow humans, and even with regards to the physical creation God originally committed to our care.

Since disciple making is so vital in each of its three aspects—knowing Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and being on mission with Jesus—we need to ask who is responsible.

We tend to refer to the kingdom of God in passing without thinking deeply about what it is. Yet Jesus is recorded as using the word kingdom more than 100 times. Something so important to Him should be important to us. How might thinking of Jesus’ mission in terms of the kingdom of God help us to understand more fully what it means to join Jesus in His mission?

## Who is responsible to make disciples?

By now we are asking, “Whose responsibility is it to make disciples? Is it my responsibility to become a disciple of Jesus and then a better disciple of His? Is it somebody else’s responsibility to disciple me? Or is it God’s responsibility to draw me to Himself and to grow me up as His disciple?” The answer to each of these three questions is “yes.” Becoming a disciple and growing as one involves all three: myself, other disciples, and God Himself.

**Being a disciple involves taking the initiative, in cooperation with God and for His glory, to know and serve God, in relationship with others, in a way that transforms us into godly wholeness.**

Every facet of disciple making begins and ends with God—whether becoming a disciple, being a disciple, or discipling others. The Apostle Paul reminds us (Romans 3:10-11) in the words of Old Testament writers, *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.”* And Jesus said (John 6:37), *“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”* He also explained (John 16:8-11) that the Holy Spirit would convince the world of their need for Jesus as Saviour. In addition, the Apostle Paul (Galatians 5:22-23) attributed godly character qualities to the work of the Spirit in our lives. In becoming, being, and making disciples, we are always cooperating with God. Without His involvement, there would be no disciples.

That said, as stated above, being a disciple involves us taking personal initiative. The *“whoever believes in Him”* of John 3:16 requires decision on our part. The *“Live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord”* of Ephesians 5:8-10 require willing obedience.

God has placed on us the onus to take responsibility. Choosing to follow Jesus is up to me. There is no one more responsible than each of us as individuals to trust Jesus as Saviour, to live for Him as Lord, and to be involved in the lives of others for the sake of His mission. And even if there was no one else who could assist us to grow as Jesus’ disciple, we still have Jesus and His Spirit to

How are you encouraged by the knowledge that God Himself has taken huge initiative to make you a disciple in the first place?

How are you encouraged as you catch a glimpse of the initiative that God takes to make you a *growing disciple*?

How are you taking responsibility for your own growth as Jesus’ disciple?

help us. We can take the initiative to deepen our relationship with Him in order to learn, change, and serve.

We are tempted to place the responsibility for our spiritual growth on the church. We come to think that if we are not growing spiritually, it is the church's fault. The preaching should be better. Small groups should be more effective. Fellow believers should be more interested in us.

We are also tempted to place the responsibility on the church and the Christian school for the discipling of our children and youth. We are drawn into thinking that teachers, pastors, and lay workers are responsible for training our children and youth to be solid Christians. The scriptures, however, place the responsibility far closer to home. It instructs parents (Ephesians 6:1-4) to bring their children up "*in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" The role of the church and the Christian school is *to assist* parents in the grand task of discipling their children.

For all of that, being a disciple of Jesus is not usually intended to be strictly between Jesus and me. We said that being a disciple involves taking the initiative, in cooperation with God and for His pleasure, to know and serve God, *in relationship with others*, in a way that transforms us into godly wholeness.<sup>3</sup> That means that we grow as disciples as we follow Jesus *together*.

The "one another" passages of scripture illustrate this powerfully: love one another, forgive one another, be at peace with each other, wash one another's feet, be devoted to one another, honor one another, live in harmony with one another, stop passing judgment on one another, accept one another, instruct one another, have equal concern for each other, serve one another, and carry each other's burden—to name just some of these one anothers.

Although discipling is a team sport, being disciplined is not something that you are able to do *to* me. We must collaborate. And making a disciple is not something that I

Is God prompting you to take *more* responsibility for yourself?

What more is He asking of you?

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<sup>3</sup> See Arthur R. Birch, "God's Leadership Ideal," to note the relationship between being a disciple and being a leader. In that article, leadership is defined as follows: "Leadership is taking the initiative, in cooperation with God and for His pleasure, to empower others through loving relationships to know and serve God together in a way that transforms us into godly wholeness." Both being a disciple and being a leader require initiative. Both involve relationship and collaboration with God and people. And both address God's three primary purposes for the human race. Clearly, being a disciple, making disciples, and equipping others to make disciple-making disciples is a primary component of leadership. And the first priority of leading oneself is taking initiative in the area of our spiritual growth.

am able to do *to* you. It is something in which we both take initiative to empower each other. We each take initiative for ourselves and to empower the other to attend to God's three central priorities for our lives: knowing Him, serving Him, and becoming like Him.

In creating the human community, God has ordained that we grow best in the context of relationship. When we talk about discipling and being discipled, we have in mind relationships that are intentionally focused on helping each other grow as disciples of Jesus; however, it is also true that growth can occur in our lives through any and all relationships. Some of these relationships are highly satisfying as delightful people unconsciously rub off on us. Other relationships are troublesome. Yet even these can result in our growth in Jesus as we deliberately chose godly responses.

Our understanding of disciple making will not be complete without grasping the particular responsibility that God has placed on local church leaders to grow people up in Jesus. This is one of the vital truths of Ephesians 4:11ff.

*11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up....*

Since gifted leaders, including pastor-teachers, cannot personally disciple every believer in the church, they must equip others to disciple. The more organic and natural this equipping is the better, yet this critical activity is unlikely to flourish without a deliberate strategy. Leaders must disciple others, training them to disciple still others. In addition, systems and structures must be put in place to support these discipling relationships. For example, small groups will be organized, mentoring relationships will be facilitated, apprenticeships will be set up, and discipling curricula and experiences will be made available. This allows discipling to happen more broadly than if it is left to happen all on its own. Let us remember that Jesus did not leave disciple making to unthinking chance. Instead, He devoted His three years of ministry to intentional disciple making and then commanded the disciples He had made to go and make more disciples.

What is your experience of growth that has happened in your life through the help of intentional disciple makers, mentors, parents, or spiritual friendships?

How have you grown through experiences with people that were less than enjoyable?

Who are you discipling? If no one, what would it take for you to take on such a responsibility?

## **What might a disciple-making pathway look like at RRCC?**

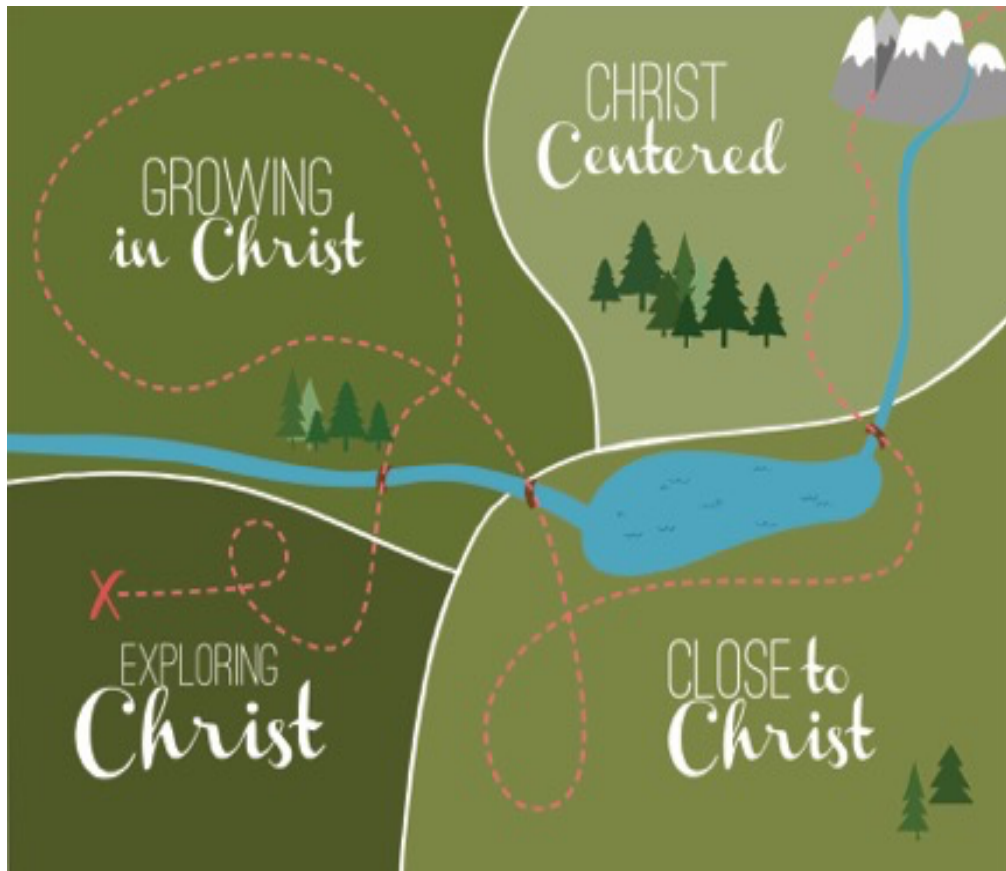
We already noted that there are discernable stages in the life of a disciple of Jesus. The arrows connecting these stages represent movement from one stage to the next. We discern, then, a pathway that begins before a pupil-to-teacher commitment is made to Jesus and continues throughout life.

We must recognize that the pathway takes us from stage to stage and that, in travelling this path, we don't leave the earlier stages behind. A disciple, who has found Christ and is now growing in Him, will still be exploring Him. A disciple, who is getting closer and closer to Christ, has not stopped exploring and growing. And a disciple who is Christ-centred remains close to Christ, as a growing, exploring follower of Jesus.

We must also realize that, in actuality, the discipling pathway is likely far more circuitous than a straight line and no two pathways look alike. In our journeys as disciples, we not only make forward progress, we also experience obstacles, find ourselves regressing, wander aimlessly at times and sometimes even get lost. Yet the journey continues, as we walk it together with one another and with Jesus.

Think for a moment of just some of the variety that exists between our life circumstances and us as individuals.

- One person comes from a stable home filled with love, another from an unstable environment that has instilled insecurity.
- One person readily welcomes Jesus as Saviour; another struggles with doubt and still another with reluctance to surrender.
- One person experiences the death of a loved one; another is more challenged by a business reversal.
- Some will need help with growing a God-honouring marriage; others will need more support with parenting.
- Some will struggle with job loss; others will wrestle with relationships at work or school.
- We all have different SHAPes—different mixes of spiritual gifts, heart (passion), abilities, personalities, and experiences.



Despite these variations, we all have a lot in common. Consider just a few of many.

- All must know who Jesus is and what He has done for us.
- All must repent and trust in Jesus Christ alone for acceptance with God.
- All must learn how to practice the presence of the triune God in our lives all day every day.
- All must establish growth habits—daily scripture reading, meditation, and prayer and many other spiritual growth practices.
- All have something to receive and something to give as we gather together in weekly corporate worship.

How would you describe what your spiritual journey has been like for you?

What have some of the important events along the way?

In summary, because we have so much in common and because a healthy disciple is a growing disciple, it can be very helpful to think in terms of each disciple walking a pathway towards maturity in Jesus. At the same time,



because we are so very different from each other and our life circumstances vary, it is helpful for us to visualize our individual pathways as quite different, as well as similar, as we head in the same direction.

That direction is knowing Jesus better and better, being transformed into His likeness, and joining Him in His mission. And because this is a lifelong journey, the journey itself is as important as the destination.

This suggests that we as a church do well to provide a variety of resources and experiences that relate to every stage of spiritual development while also addressing a wide variety of needs that can either become blocks to the pathway or stepping stones along its length. This raises the critical question: What resources and experiences do we have to offer to help people far from God to begin a relationship with Jesus and to continue to help them cooperate with Him in changing their character and joining Him in His mission?

Sometimes God uses us in the lives of others *despite* our difficult circumstances but most often He uses us precisely *because* of those circumstances and scars. How might God want to use you in someone else's life because of the way in which you have grown through challenges of your own?

## How do we make disciples at RRCC?

Before listing the varied discipling resources we offer and develop at RRCC, we do well to ensure that we approach our disciple making efforts in a way that deliberately keeps key factors in focus.

- Disciple making is our central focus, not an optional activity at RRCC.
- A disciple is a follower of Jesus who is getting to know Him, is being changed by Him, and is committing to His mission.
- Making discipling begins with people far from God and continues for a lifetime through various stages of growth.
- Enjoying Jesus and becoming like Him in our person and our mission is the goal of every disciple and of all disciple making.
- Growth as a disciple involves every dimension of our being—being, relating, knowing, doing, and feeling.
- All disciples are responsible for their own growth and for growth in others in cooperation with God.

- Relationships are the indispensable key to discipling: we grow best *together*.
- Some of what we will do to grow as disciples and to help others grow will be very much like what others do—and some of what we do will be very different.

This still leaves the question of how we make disciples at RRCC. Since equipping disciples-making disciples is our central ministry focus, we must evaluate all our ministries with regards to their disciple-making potential. Then we seek to harness every ministry for discipling. The following is a partial list of activities and their role in discipling. Some are specific ministries. Others are opportunities that can be a part of various ministries.

- **Mentoring Relationships**
  - Since discipling almost always happens in the context of relationship, mentor-mentee relationships are key.
  - These might be construed as mentor-mentee, peer mentors, discipler-disciple, or spiritual friendships; however, more important than titles is the priority of each person taking the initiative to build spiritual maturity in others.
  - Mentoring relationships might be one-on-one or they might be micro groups of three or four individuals prompting growth in each other.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Some micro groups use the following outline and questions.

*Sharing Our Souls*

1. How have things been going with you since we last met?
2. How has your spiritual walk been? Be specific.
3. Is there anything you have been struggling with that you want/need to share?

*Sharing our Bible reading*

1. What did you get out of your Bible reading?
2. Were there any questions that came out of the reading?
3. Was there anything God spoke to you personally about?

*Sharing our vision for the lost*

1. Have there been any developments since our last time?
2. Have you had any opportunities to share your faith?

- Leaders will model such relationships. They will also multiply them by encouraging their disciples to disciple others.
  - LEAD is available to help identify and equip those who want to be mentors and those who want to have a mentor. It will also help them find each other.
  - LEAD disciples believers, ultimately seeking to foster leadership ability as well as spiritual maturity, through mentoring relationships in which individuals process growth resources together and document what they are learning and how they are growing in a journal.
  - Mentoring relationships may be quite *apart* from any ministry or they may be *a part of* various ministries like small groups, ministry teams, men's ministry, women's ministry, worship teams, etc. Whatever the setting, intentionality is required.
- **Support of Personal and Family Feeding on the Word and Conversation with God**
    - We help identify and make available materials.
    - We give airtime to story telling by those, at various stages of development, are succeeding in this area of their walk with Jesus.
- **Corporate Worship Gatherings**
    - We look for ways to encourage relational contact in connection with our worship gatherings, whether individuals are comfortable in Common Grounds or not.
    - We model enjoyment of the triune God in our gatherings.
    - We take advantage of a variety of opportunities for praying with others.
    - Our bulletin sermon outlines include prompts for processing with others the messages we preach.

- **Small Groups**

- Small groups have the potential to emulate Jesus' discipling of the twelve disciples. The potential extends beyond a godly group leader to members in life-on-life ministry to each other.
- As much as possible, RRCC pastors and elders model SG involvement.
- Although groups may study a variety of Bible passages over the years rather than a systematic theology curriculum, they provide strategic opportunities for discipling as believers in relationship interact with each and God's Word.
- Group leaders ensure that shepherding, real teaching, modeling, authenticity and accountability are taking place.
- Group members grow as leaders share responsibility for various components of group life such as Bible study, prayer, member care, serving together, and fellowship.

- **Alpha**

- Alpha provides opportunity for believers to bring seeker friends under the sound of the gospel.
- Alpha models for believers how to explain the gospel to seekers.
- Alpha also is a basic discipling opportunity for new believers.

- **Evangelism training**

- Jesus' mission to make disciples must include evangelism.
- Since Jesus gave the Great Commission to disciples He had trained for at least a couple of years, we must also ensure that we give training in sharing our faith.
- AWAKE is one example of basic training.
- Alpha models gospel explanation.
- We recognize that only ten to fifteen percent of believers have the gift of evangelism, yet all believers are obligated to point people to Jesus; therefore, we help

disciples with other gifts to discern how their gifts can contribute to evangelism.

- We invite our people to take advantage of training offered by external organizations.
- We seek to regularly offer training in a variety of settings. For example, a small group may choose to adopt a training series. *Just Walk Across the Room* and *Bursting Your Bubble: A Relationship Revolution* are two examples of DVD-driven curriculum.

Which aspects of our church's disciple-making strategy have been helpful to you?

- **Ministry Teams**

- Every ministry team gives thought to how their team is making disciples.
- We seek to align serving with discipling, rather than allow it to be at cross-purposes with it.

- **Discipleship International—Equip to Serve**

- This ministry, led by one of our own Abbotsford-based missionaries is training an increasing number of our people in growing, living, and sharing their faith.
- We do all we can to encourage these equipped disciples to disciple others.

Since most of us live very full lives, lives that leave little room for even more commitments, how could you adjust what you are already experiencing so that it becomes more productive for you to grow as a disciple and/or for you to disciple others?

- **Discipling Resources**

- LEAD deliberately discovers and makes available a wide variety of discipling resources.
- These resources include items relevant to the various stages of spiritual growth and to the various challenges and stages of life.
- Through our RRCC website, LEAD makes its resources available to those who are committed to processing material together.
- Staff, elders, and all believers are encouraged to share resources that have been useful to them and/or they think might be useful to others.

The foregoing is intended to give some structure to our thoughts and practices around making disciples. This is just a beginning. As we continue to focus on disciple

making in action, our ideas will change and grow. Our resource inventory will be enriched. Those who are capable of discipling others will be multiplied. The culture of our church will undergo continuous change as we continue on the path of transformation from being those who *go to church* to those who *are the church*, the church that obeys the Jesus' final command to make disciples of all nations.

*Lead Pastor Art Birch authored "Ross Road Community Church Making Disciples" in 2016 for the purpose of assisting the church—its individuals and its teams—to obey more fully Jesus' Great Commission.*