

Session B: Becoming Disciples Who Help Jesus Make Disciples

Prayer: Dear Lord, *help us love you.* Change our ways of life so that we may become disciples who live with you. Help us live our lives in an ever-greater awareness of you. Make our hearts and minds ready to receive you and to be filled with your love, comfort and strength. Help us listen carefully and give you time and attention. Turn our focus from our own concerns to yours, and strengthen our faith. Help us turn away from distorted worldviews to focus on your reality and your presence in our lives. Restore and refresh us when we turn to you. Amen.

Scripture Reflection: Acts 8:26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went.

Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."

So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Discussion Questions

What did you hear? Notice that God takes us where we need to be; we need to be prepared to share our faith stories.

Can/does this type of thing happen today? Why or why not?

Do we have a calling like Philip?

How does Philip introduce Jesus?

How do we do this as a church?

Helping Jesus Make Disciples

In John 15, Jesus says "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." Philip shows that discipleship involves helping to form people in the faith and prepare them to walk with Jesus. It is very possible that this is the story of the beginning of one of the very earliest Christian churches. Consider the history of the Ethiopian church (one of the very first Christian churches) and how Christianity spread through the world.

Philip is doing what Jesus told him to do. In the Great Commission, Jesus directs us to bring others to meet and know Jesus: And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The last words of Jesus in each Gospel are the same commandment.

Is it still possible for us to be disciples and help make new and stronger disciples?

First, how is it possible for us to become disciples?

Jesus is alive today. We believe that because of the resurrection Jesus is alive and comes to be present with us in our daily lives and to help us live in loving relationships with God and one another.

Hebrews 7:22-25 says: "Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant. Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist so that we may participate in the ongoing action of his glorified life. We are united with him in living relationship to God. In John 6:56, Jesus says "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." Our Christianity is something that can and does happen every day; we are not just waiting for a second coming.

We can bring others to meet and know Jesus and that is precisely what Jesus directs us to do in the Great Commission: And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey

everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Becoming a disciple means actually living with Jesus. Jesus' ongoing life makes him accessible to us today. We can live in relationship with Jesus now, not simply by faith in who he was or belief in who he may be. For us to become Christians, it is not enough for us to believe that Jesus was or will be, we must experience his presence right now in our lives. We must overcome the idea of a separation from Jesus in time and place. We need to experience the reality of Jesus' life in our own. We need to spend time with God now and Jesus makes this possible.

A disciple is not a person who simply studies the teachings of Jesus; a disciple is a person who actually lives with the teacher and shares his life, a person who truly comes to know Jesus. A disciple is a person who lives with and learns from Jesus. Discipleship is not something you "know" or "have." Rather, it is a path you are on, where you are continually learning from and growing closer to Christ.

If we accept him, Jesus helps us develop a personal relationship with God. Jesus helps us recreate the relationship with God that we have a tendency to fall away from. Jesus is not just a sacrifice for us. Jesus said, in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Jesus is the personification in the natural world of a living relationship with God. Sin is separation from God, our failure to live consciously in an awareness of our relationship with God. Jesus overcomes sin by making it possible for us to live in relationship with God again. Jesus lives to help each person relate to God in his or her own life now. Jesus came to be present with us in the day to day activities of our lives.

What makes the church different from any other organization is its purpose to bring people to Jesus and help them come to know Jesus. Healthy, growing churches are made up of disciples who help Jesus make new and stronger disciples. Church leadership begins with an understanding that making disciples is the center of all church activities. The approach of Jesus and Paul was spiritual multiplication and reproduction of believers, not just adding members to the church.

So we need to focus on how our church community supports the discipleship process. How are we achieving the purpose of discipleship? We need to ask how do we help people to become and remain committed disciples? We can ask: How are adults formed in the faith when they come to our community? And what is the spiritual path that a person can expect?

Biblical Illustration of the Discipleship Process

The Bible shows us that discipleship happened by people being introduced to Jesus, living with him and coming to know him and then being sent out to serve.

The beginning steps of the Christian journey are described in the second half of the first chapter of John. The gospel describes the process of gathering and forming people into the Christian faith. In these stories, we find *the calling of disciples and their identification of Jesus*. First, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God. Then Jesus invites Andrew and another disciple to "Come and See" and

Andrew goes to find his brother, Peter, and proclaims that he has found the Messiah. Jesus also invites Philip to "Follow me" and Philip in turn finds Nathanael and proclaims Jesus the one described in the Mosaic Law and the prophets. Then Nathanael identifies Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus invites people to "*come and see*" and to "follow me" and to become his disciples. A disciple is not a person who simply studies the teachings of Jesus; a disciple is a person who actually lives with the teacher and shares his life, a person who truly comes to know Jesus. Jesus invites us to live with him. In this manner we *come to know Jesus*.

When Jesus is present in our lives, we as disciples *come to serve Jesus*. Through involvement in our unique ministries we see the signs and wonders of lives (including our own) being reoriented towards God. At this point, we identify Jesus and discover the Good News of the Gospel. And we realize that we too, like Andrew and Philip, have an invitation to make to other people to "Come and See Jesus."

From living with Jesus, the first followers became believers and then went out and proclaimed the Good News of Jesus themselves. Philip became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and so he invited Nathanael to "Come and see Jesus."

A Flowchart Model for a Process of Discipleship

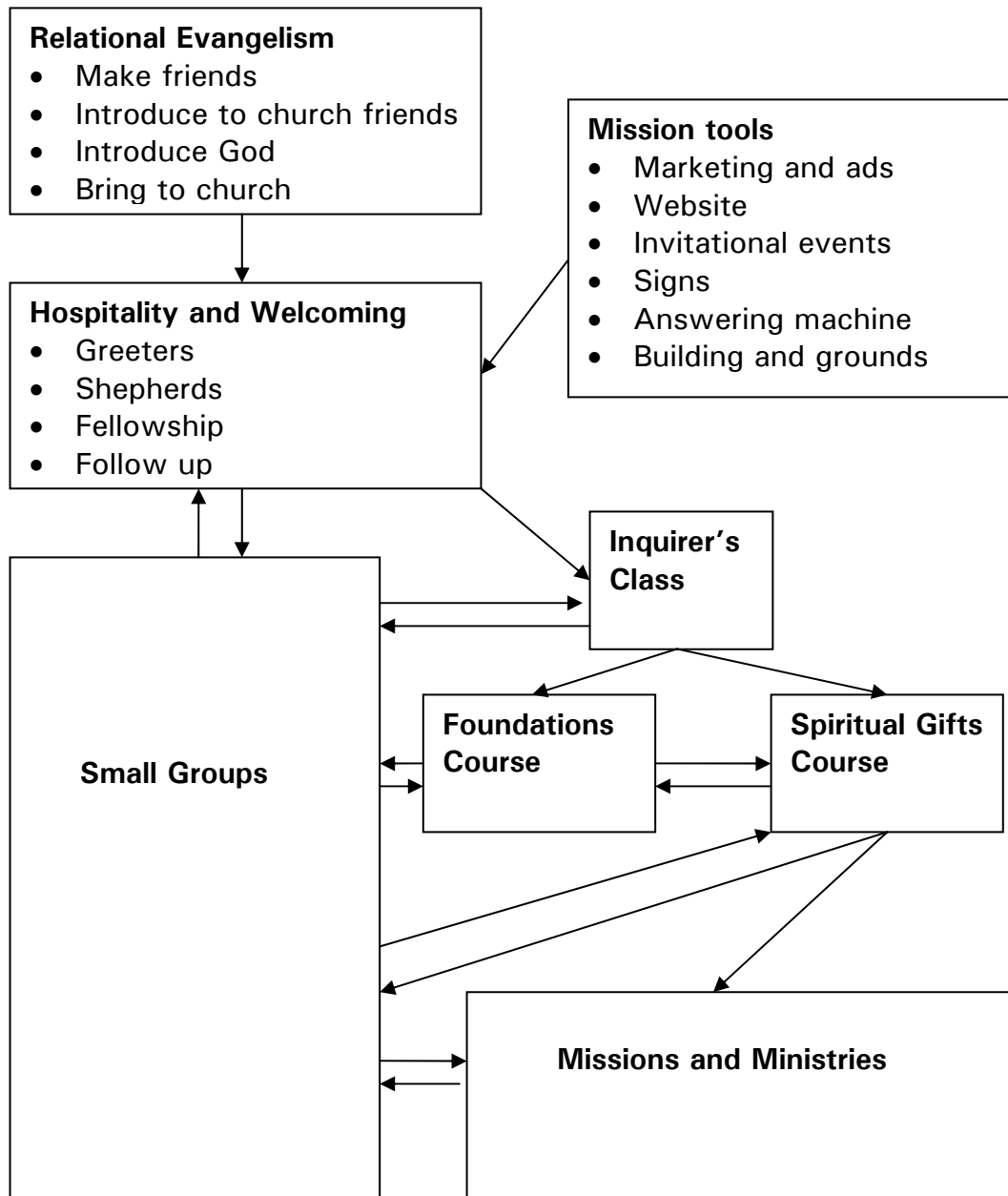
Passionate Christian congregations are focused primarily on helping people meet, know and serve Jesus. The most alive congregations focus continually on becoming disciples and growing into the body of Christ. Individuals in these churches have increased their own awareness of God by being part of bringing people to Jesus and helping each person both recognize Jesus' presence and live more consciously in that presence. Becoming animated by the Spirit, these are truly communities where people come to see God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly day by day. Energy in these communities comes not from solving problems or creating new programs but from discovering or reaffirming that they are (and are becoming) Christians. In most everything they do, these congregations proclaim the true source of their power, the presence of Jesus in their lives. Christian churches need to evaluate their passion for serving Jesus and helping people with their Christian journey.

The next page shows a flowchart of discipleship processes in church communities. We need to look at each of these processes as entry points and consciously bring people into community with God and one another.

This process of "come and see, come to know and come to serve Jesus" is the Christian journey that is encouraged through church communities. The journey is not linear, but circular in an upward spiral. A person may enter the process at any point, perhaps by response to invitation, or coming to learn about Jesus in worship or Sunday school or through serving at a soup kitchen. But once the path is started, it may lead farther. Paul says we go from glory to glory. To the extent this model represents a path of spiritual development, we also need to individually consider how we can continue to develop various aspects of our personalities, to participate in each of the aspects of the spiritual path. We may need to come

to Jesus in worship and prayer and offering. We may need to continually come to know Jesus better through Christian formation. And we may need to come to serve more. It's tempting to focus on one area, but we need to stretch to grow along this spiritual path.

Processes of Discipleship in the Church



COME AND SEE JESUS ❖ COME TO KNOW JESUS ❖ COME TO SERVE JESUS

This is only a mechanical process unless it is focused on loving God and loving one another (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) and bringing others to Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). The most important parts of this diagram are the arrows, which represent how we stay relationally connected and make handoffs among people and groups. "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds [and encourage] one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Discussion Questions

- Is each step important? Why?
- How do we do each step in our community?
- How do we introduce people to Jesus? How do people come to this community?
- How are adults formed in the faith when they come?
- What is the spiritual path that a person can expect?
- How are we doing with each step in the process?
- What steps are we missing?
- What are the challenges with each step in the process?
- What areas do we need to spend more time with?
- If the handoffs are most important, how are we creating the relationships to make them successful?
- Do people in the congregation or coming to the congregation understand and participate in the discipleship process?
- Where are most people in the congregation on their spiritual path?
- Does our community share its expectations for a spiritual journey?
- What are your reactions to this model? How would the larger congregation react to it?

Developing an Apostolic Core

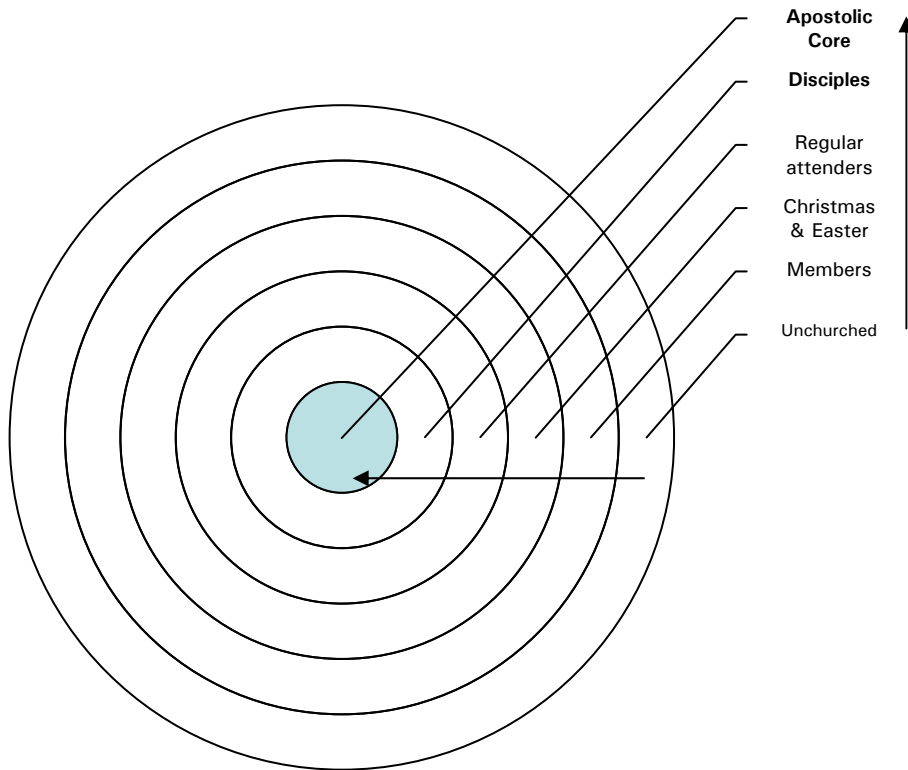
Consider the circle diagram, below, as representative of a church community. People have different levels of commitment and involvement in church communities. To bring new energy and life into the community and its members, a congregation needs to provide intentional ways for movement to discipleship and the apostolic core to occur.

The largest group, the *unchurched* circle represents people who do not know Jesus and are not connected to the church. This is the mission field and the objective is to move people directly to discipleship (vs. attendance). Sometimes this is easier than moving regular attenders to discipleship.

The *regular attendance* circle represents people who attend worship but have little other spiritual focus or involvement in the church. The *Christmas and Easter* circle represents people who consider themselves members, but only come to church on special occasions and seem little interested in a deeper faith. The *members* circle represents people who are loosely affiliated with the church, knowing a few people and perhaps expecting to be married or buried there.

The *disciple* circle represents baptized Christians who are discerning their spiritual gifts and being drawn into a deeper spiritual life of prayer, study, worship and ministry.

The *apostolic core* is made up of committed disciples who lead a disciplined spiritual life and participate in the work of Christ in fellowship, evangelism, ministry and stewardship.



Developing Expectations

We may better structure the discipleship process by making expectations clear. The word “expect” comes from “expectare,” which means to look forward to, so expectations are our hopes and visions. More than an ethical pronouncement of what a person “should” do, they need to be a statement of the reality of how we may strengthen our spiritual development. Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life* is a good example of identifying Christian expectations. Examples of expectations include participation in worship, a small group, a ministry or mission, and stewardship.

Questions to answer are: What are the benefits of being a member? What are the requirements for membership (in this community and the Episcopal Church)? What are the responsibilities of membership? How can I get involved in ministry? What do I do now that I am a member?

How would this congregation react to clearer expectations? Could we have expectations and still accept people wherever they are on their spiritual journey (recognizing God’s love for them)? What kind of expectations do we need?

Expectations are really the hopes we have for people in our community; and meeting expectations is also a way of worshipping God. Worship is showing our love for God. It’s more than the time we spend together in church on Sunday morning praying and praising God. Worship is all of our efforts in life to love God and to know God better. St. Paul tells us in

Romans 12:1 and 2 to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God and says that true worship is being dedicated to pleasing God. Worship is doing all that we can with our lives to express our love for God by offering ourselves to God. Worship needs to envelope our whole lives.

To begin to express our love for God we need to recognize how much God loves us. God has created each of us to be with God, and Jesus' loving sacrifice makes that possible. God gives each of us all that we are and all that we have and asks us to use our whole lives to love God!

We can express our love for God in nearly every aspect of our lives if we have the right intention, if we approach life with an attitude of appreciation. This is the beginning of prayer, stewardship, study, service and other spiritual disciplines.

For many of us, we have the best opportunities to express our love for God in and through our church community. A Christian church needs to express its love for God in all of its activities.

One way a church community worships God is by telling others about God. Paul says in II Corinthians 4:19 that as God's grace brings more and more people to Christ, God will receive more and more glory. A worshipping community does not keep God's love a secret but continually shares the Gospel and welcomes new people into the body of Christ. Making these invitations to come to see and know Jesus is the most loving thing we can do for others and is an excellent way of glorifying God!

A second way a church community worships God is by coming to know God better. In God's family, God wants us to grow into spiritual maturity, to become like Jesus in the way we think, feel and act. This worships God. Paul says as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more like him and reflect his glory even more (II Corinthians 3:18). This happens best in small groups, like Bible studies and prayer groups, which offer intimate opportunities for people to experience the transforming power of fellowship and love as well as learning. Small groups are a foundation for strengthening personal relationships with God and helping a church community worship God better.

A third way a church community worships God is by loving one another. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Paul says (in Romans 15:7) that we glorify God when we welcome others just as Christ has welcomed us. A church community glorifies God by being a place of hospitality and generosity to members and visitors and by helping the sick and suffering in a natural and loving way. I John 3:16 says, "We know love by this: that he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." This happens more in our personal relationships than in programs or processes and small groups are a foundation for this too because this kind of love best happens in close relationships with one another where we share our true feelings, support each other and grow in humility and love. Small groups are truly where we experience what Paul is calling us to in Ephesians 4: "all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Small groups are a foundation to becoming part of the body of Christ and loving God and one another. With each person who becomes

involved in a small group – whether it’s a Bible study or confirmation or pastoral care group or prayer group or gifts course – a church becomes stronger in its worship.

A fourth way a church community worships God is by serving others with its gifts. I Peter (4:10-11) says that we glorify God when we serve one another with whatever gift each of us has received and with the strength that God supplies. This service happens in outreach activities of the congregation and individual members. The key in outreach and all church activities is more and more using each of the gifts we have received “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” A mutual ministry happens best as each member of the body accepts and celebrates his or her role. Each person is encouraged to recognize and use his or her unique gifts as part of the body of Christ. Each individual offers his or her gifts as an offering out of their nature and passion and is thereby transformed. In the body, church leadership is not limited to or centered in a single person; and ministry teams may take responsibility for entire areas of ministry. Church leaders do not have to manage all of the work of the church and may focus on visioning and discernment through prayer, study and reflection.

A church becomes a stronger worshipping community by pleasing God in evangelism, formation, fellowship and ministry. God is pleased as a church community becomes the body of Christ here in the world and that is the greatest worship that we can offer. We need to explain our expectations in these areas.

Resources for Further Study

Mead, Loren B. The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier. Alban Institute, 1991.

Payne, Claude E. & Hamilton Beazley. Reclaiming the Great Commission: A practical model for transforming denominations and congregations. Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Christian A. Schwarz, Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches. ChurchSmart Resources, 1996.

Warren, Rick. The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission. Zondervan, 1995.