



HEBRON

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

Dr. Landon Dowden

**WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHURCH?  
LESSON 7**

**HEALTHY CHURCHES ARE FILLED WITH GROWING DISCIPLES  
What is a Healthy Church – Lesson #7**

**I. WHERE ARE ALL THE DISCIPLES?**

a. Anyabwile:

- i. It is impossible to separate the health of a local church from the health of its members.
- ii. It may be the case that the most chronic problem facing churches and Christians is the lack of consistent spiritual growth and progress in discipleship.
- iii. Advancement in the knowledge and likeness of Christ, spiritual maturity and progress toward it, are supposed to be normal for the Christian.
- iv. It is normal for Christians to grow, to work for growth, and to expect increasing spiritual maturity.

**II. THE PLAN**

- a. Ephesians 4:11-13
- b. Colossians 1:28; 2:6-7
- c. Matthew 28:18-20
- d. Philippians 3:12-14

**III. WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?**

a. Mark 1:16-20

- i. Called by Christ (this is where discipleship starts).
- ii. Respond to Christ.

b. John 8:31-32

- i. Disciples abide in His Word, know the Truth, and are set free.

c. Matthew 10:24-25/Luke 6:40 (fully trained)

- i. Not above sharing the sufferings of Christ.

d. Luke 14:26-27, 33

- i. A disciple loves Jesus more than anything or anyone else.
- ii. A disciple bears his cross and follows Jesus.
- iii. A disciple renounces all that he has.



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- e. John 15:8-17 – Disciples . . .
  - i. Glorify the Father by bearing fruit and proving they are disciples.
  - ii. Abide in His love by keeping His commandments.
  - iii. Possess full joy.
  - iv. Love one another – laying down our lives for one another.
- f. Acts 9:36 – A disciple is full of good works and acts of charity.
- g. Other marks of a disciple (From Mark Dever)
  - i. A desire to know what God says. (Job 23:12; Jeremiah 15:16; Deuteronomy 6:5-7; Romans 10:17; I Peter 2:2)
  - ii. A break from the world's standards. (I Corinthians 10:13; II Corinthians 5:17)
  - iii. Self-discipline. (Galatians 5:22-23; Matthew 16:24; Luke 3:11; I Corinthians 9:25-27)
  - iv. A desire to seek other disciples. (Romans 15:5-6; Acts 2:42; Ephesians 3:17-19; Hebrews 10:25; I Peter 1:22; I John 1:2, 7)
  - v. Evangelism. (I John 3:16-24; I Peter 2:21; II Corinthians 9:6-7; Philippians 1:21; Matthew 10:32; John 14:12)
  - vi. Perseverance. (Philippians 3:13-14; I John 1-4; Psalms 37:23-24; Romans 6:1-14; II Peter 1:1-10; John 5:37-39)

#### **IV. DISCIPLING: HELPING OTHERS TO FOLLOW JESUS (DEVER)**

- a. Definitions
  - i. Discipling – helping others to follow Jesus; deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ.
  - ii. Discipleship – our own following Christ.
  - iii. Biblical discipling is helping others to follow Jesus by doing deliberate spiritual good to them.
- b. Oriented toward others
  - i. Being a disciple of Jesus means orienting our lives toward others, just as Jesus did. It means laboring for the sake of others.
  - ii. The discipling life is an others oriented life. It labors in the power of God to proclaim Christ and present others mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)



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- iii. When you attend church on Sundays, do you only look for what you can get, or do you also look for ways to give?
    - 1. Where did you park?
    - 2. What time did you get to church?
    - 3. Where did you sit?
    - 4. To whom did you speak?
    - 5. Each one of these decisions provided you with an opportunity to give yourself to others and so join in the work of Christ.
  - iv. How do you use your meals and spare time throughout the week?
  - v. Do you strategize for evangelism or for ways to build up other Christians?
- c. Discipling is initiating a relationship in which you teach, correct, model, and love. It takes great humility.
- i. INITIATING
    - 1. Discipling necessarily involves initiating. It's not passive.
    - 2. You cannot disciple everybody, so you have to pick this person and not that one.
      - a. Practically, do your schedules overlap?
      - b. You have to discern not just who needs help, but who knows they need help and is willing to receive it.
        - i. You do not want to waste time with people who are not teachable, because you *will be* wasting time.
        - ii. Look for people who welcome counsel and instruction.
      - c. Discipling in the gospel means that sometimes you lead the way in confessing weakness or sin.
        - i. By doing so, you demonstrate what it looks like not to find your justification in yourself, but in Christ.
        - ii. Christian discipleship isn't just about displaying your strengths; it's about displaying your weakness, too.
        - iii. 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."
      - d. You initiate in the discipling relationship even if someone else has asked you to disciple them.
  - ii. OUTSIDE THE CHURCH, INSIDE THE CHURCH
    - 1. The first stage of discipling can involve establishing a friendship with a non-Christian.
      - a. You explain the gospel and call him/her to repentance and faith.



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- b. Once they repent and believe, he/she should be baptized into church membership.
  - c. Discipling in the fullest sense includes evangelism and conversion.
2. We are to disciple both individually and corporately.
- a. Together we sit under the preached Word, and together we enjoy the Lord's Supper to proclaim the Lord's death and to remind one another that "we who are many are one body." (1 Corinthians 10:17)
  - b. When the church scatters, the ministry of teaching and oversight should continue in the lives of members.
    - i. This happens over weeknight desserts or Saturday morning breakfasts, while folding laundry or taking trips to the grocery store.
    - ii. Discipling lasts all week as members meet to talk, pray, encourage, and assist one another in the fight for love and holiness.
- iii. TEACHING
1. At its core, discipling is teaching. We teach with words. We teach all the words that Jesus taught his disciples, and all the words of the Bible.
- a. Corporately, this is why our church preaches expositionally and consecutively through books of the Bible, alternating between the Old and New Testaments, as well as between big chunks of Scripture and little ones.
  - b. Interpersonally, teaching occurs as people learn to have spiritually meaningful conversations with each other.
    - i. Talk about Sunday's sermon.
    - ii. Ask your friends what God has been teaching them about Himself.
- iv. CORRECTING
1. Sometimes discipling requires you to warn someone about the choices he or she is making.
- a. People grow when you teach them general truths, yes, but also when you correct their particular errors.
  - b. Part of being a Christian is recognizing that sin deceives us, and we need other believers to help us see the things we cannot see about ourselves.



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2. You can lead in a discipling relationship by inviting others to correct you, and making it easy for them to do so.
  - a. You must fear God more than man by being willing to correct others when necessary, and risk their rejection of you for it.
3. Ultimately the work of correction belongs to the whole congregation, which occurs when a member proves more committed to his or her sin than to Christ.
  - a. After multiple rounds of warning, the person will be excluded from membership and the Lord's Table (Matthew 18:15-20).
  - b. The vast majority of correction in a church, however, should occur in the private context of discipling relationships.

v. MODELING

1. Jesus didn't just command his disciples to teach people. He told them to teach people to obey.
2. The goal of discipling is to see lives transformed, which means it involves more than reading a book or even the Bible with another person.
3. Ultimately, discipling involves living out the whole Christian life before others.
4. We communicate not merely with our words but by our whole lives.
5. An apprentice learns by listening and watching and participating, little by little, with more responsibility being earned over time.
6. Most of all, discipling looks like what God designed for the home, where dads and moms teach in word and deed through all areas of life, and then draw the children into the work of adulthood.
7. Discipling is inviting others to imitate you, making your trust in Christ an example to be followed. It requires you to be willing to be watched, and then folding people into your life so that they actually do watch.
8. All of us should be able to say to the other Christians in our lives, as Paul did, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

vi. MUTUAL LOVE

1. There is something of a teacher-student relationship. But there will also be peer-to-peer mutuality and love, such that the discipling often goes both ways.
2. Even as I work to do them spiritual good, they do me spiritual good. They help me better follow Jesus.
3. Hebrews 10:24-25," And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."



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**vii. HUMILITY**

1. Helping others follow Jesus cannot be done without risk.
2. Just as you have to humble yourself to be discipled, so you have to humble yourself to disciple.
3. Discipling involves difficult things – saying no, persevering through troubles, knowing when to bear with someone, and doing it. Your invitations might be spurned, your counsel rejected.
4. Christian discipling is the work of one beggar pointing another beggar to bread.
5. A church can be thick with mentoring relationships even if they are not formally called “discipling relationships.” After all, discipling really is just a bunch of church members taking responsibility to prepare one another for glory. It’s one way we see the New Testament idea that we are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9).
6. People will sometimes move away. The reality of transience, particularly in many cities, requires us to maintain open-handedness toward these people we love.
7. We don’t invest and share and pour in and pray and love for what we might receive – other than the satisfaction and joy that comes from knowing they are better equipped for wherever they go next, and ultimately for Christ’s coming.

**viii. GUIDING TOWARD HEAVEN**

1. We are all disciples; the only question is, of whom?
2. Are we following other believers toward the heavenly city, and helping still more to do the same?

**V. OBJECTIONS TO DISCIPLING (DEVER)**

- a. This discipler is not ideal.
  - i. Neither are you. God’s the only perfect one in this equation. The more humble you are, the more you’ll find you have to learn from any other true disciple.
- b. If a person is always listening to her discipler, she might no longer submit to other good authorities like parents, husband, or church.
  - i. Done well, good discipling will encourage appropriate submission to any authorities established by God.



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- c. This whole thing seems self-centered and prideful.
  - i. Christian discipling calls us to follow someone only insofar as he or she follows Christ. It doesn't call us to follow another's style, or cultural preferences, or worldly wisdom, or personal habits.
  - ii. It's both humbling and biblical.
- d. Isn't it just pushy, and aren't you imposing yourself on someone else?
  - i. Christian discipling works through a mutually agreed upon relationship.
- e. I don't need it. I mean, surely the most important things about the Christian life are self-evident! So I'm too busy for this to be a priority.
  - i. Jesus died not for separate individuals, but for a church. By adopting you, God brought you into a family, so that now you have brothers and sisters. We demonstrate our family membership and love for him through our love for one another. We do that through our submission to and fellowship with a local church. Christianity is personal but not private. You need to be involved in the lives of others and you need them in yours. God is the only one who doesn't need to be taught!
- f. This is just for extroverts.
  - i. No, this is for Christians. The number of these relationships you might have will vary according to personality, life circumstances, and so forth. But having none of them is not an option for a faith centered on love and forgiveness.
- g. I can't disciple. I'm imperfect, erring, and too young!
  - i. If you are truly following Christ, all you need to do is share what you do know, not what you don't know. For many people around you, that will mean sharing the gospel! With fellow church members, this may mean initiating spiritual conversations by asking questions, sharing what you're learning, and praying for them. Anyone truly following Christ can disciple.
- h. Conclusion
  - i. Discipling is helping someone follow Jesus by doing deliberate spiritual good in his or her life.
  - ii. Under the sovereignty of God, the future generation of disciples depends on us following the example of these first disciples. Discipling is part of our own discipleship to Christ.



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**VI. A CULTURE OF DISCIPLING (DEVER)**

- a.** In the life of a church, spiritual growth and health should be the norm. It should be normal to see people growing and maturing spiritually. Spiritual growth is not optional for the Christian; it indicates life.
- b.** Churches don't need programs so much as they need cultures of discipling, cultures where each member prioritizes the spiritual health of others.
- c.** When people are growing as disciples, there will be an increase in holiness rooted in Christian self-denial.
- d.** Here are other evidences of growth:
  - i.** Growing numbers of people are being called to missions.
  - ii.** Older members are getting a fresh sense of their responsibility in evangelism and in discipling younger members.
  - iii.** Younger members attend the funerals of older members out of love.
  - iv.** Increased praying in the church and more prayers centered on evangelism and ministry opportunities.
  - v.** More members sharing the gospel with outsiders.
  - vi.** Less reliance among members on the church's programs and more spontaneous ministry activities arising from members.
  - vii.** Informal gatherings among church members characterized by spiritual conversation, including an apparent willingness to confess sin while simultaneously pointing to the cross.
  - viii.** Increased and sacrificial giving.
  - ix.** Increased fruit of the Spirit.
    - x.** Members making career sacrifices so that they can serve the church.
    - xi.** Husbands leading their wives sacrificially.
    - xii.** Wives submitting to their husbands.
    - xiii.** Parents discipling their children in the faith.
    - xiv.** A corporate willingness to discipline unrepentant and public sin.
    - xv.** A corporate love for an unrepentant sinner shown in the pursuit of him or her before discipline is enacted.





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## VII. THE LOCAL CHURCH IS BETTER

- a. The local church – this Father-designed, Jesus-authorized, and Spirit-gifted body – is far better equipped to undertake the work of discipling believers than simply you and your one friend. Jesus does not promise that you and your one friend will defeat the gates of hell. He promises that the church will do this.
- b. The work of pastors
  - i. Pastors disciple and equip discipled with God's Word.
    1. In the New Testament, the fundamental role of the pastor or elder is to disciple by teaching God's Word.
    2. God sets pastors apart to disciple the church by teaching them God's Word.
      - a. Pastors teach both in corporate gatherings and in one-on-one or small group settings.
      - b. And one of their goals in teaching is to equip the church for works of ministry so that the church can build itself up in love (Ephesians 4:11-16). They disciple members so that members can disciple.
    3. Pastors teaching the Word is the core of a church's discipling ministry. It provides the food and water that feeds all the other discipling relationships within the church.
    4. Find a church where God's Word will be taught to you – for your soul's sake and for the sake of you helping others.
  - ii.
  - iii.
- c. The responsibility of members
  - i. The whole congregation is responsible to make sure that each member is loved and spurned on to love. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Hebrews 10:24)
  - ii. This responsibility takes a lot of forms. (Romans 12:10-16)
  - iii. The New Testament ultimately charges the gathered congregation with responsibility for ensuring that members live up to their professions of faith and covenants with each other.
  - iv. When discipling those within our congregation we can appeal to:
    1. Sunday's sermon
    2. The example set by our elders/pastors
    3. The threat of discipline for unrepentant sin.
  - v. Plus, I know I'm personally responsible, as a part of my corporate responsibility, for pursuing a fellow member in all of these ways.
  - vi. Formalizing our obligations to one another as a congregation helps us to commit to each person who joins the church. It aids our sense of ownership and responsibility. It gives form and shape to our discipling relationships.



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- vii. 1Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”
- viii. Hebrews 10:24, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”

## VIII. HOW DO WE DISCIPLE? (Dever – *Discipling*)

### a. Choose Someone (Chapter 7)

#### i. Family Member

1. We have a special responsibility for the members of our own family. In the family, God gives life-long relationships and natural grounds for affection and concern. And those natural affections and responsibilities should be employed for Christward ends.
2. These relationships are the most important discipling charge you have.

#### ii. Spiritual State

1. We should evangelize our non-Christian friends.
2. We disciple Christians
  - a. 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

#### iii. Church Membership

1. We have a greater responsibility for our own congregation – to help them and be helped by them.
2. If a friend of yours attends an unhealthy church, you might be doing damage to their spiritual life by discipling them. How? Your spiritual support, ironically, enables him or her to remain in a church that does not teach the Bible.
3. It is normally more expedient to build discipling relationships within the context of one’s church.

#### iv. Gender

1. When it comes to a normal, deliberate discipling relationship, it is wise for men to disciple men and women to disciple women.
2. We should love everyone in the church, and at the same time labor to avoid wrong intimacies.

#### v. Age

1. Normally, we disciple someone younger than ourselves, but Scripture is full of exceptional examples of the younger teaching the older.



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- vi. Different from You**
  - 1. God can use those with whom we have things in common to stir each of us to growth.
  - 2. We can also learn from those with whom we have little in common.
  - 3. The gospel is displayed not just in the unity of liking each other, but the unity of learning from one another.
- vii. Teachability**
  - 1. Proverbs again and again commends the teachable son and repudiates the fool who scorns rebuke, instruction, and counsel.
  - 2. You don't want to spend time trying to teach someone who thinks you have nothing to teach them, and that they have nothing to learn. Teach the teachable and try to be teachable yourself.
- viii. Faithfulness to teach others**
  - 1. We want to disciple everyone, and we especially want to disciple those who will turn and disciple those who will disciple others.
  - 2. We are not simply mentoring the next generation; we are trying to reach all generations to come!
- ix. Proximity and Schedules**
  - 1. Generally, find those whose schedules align with your own.
  - 2. Consider where you live or work, and your time commitments with family, job, and church.
  - 3. Be wise and thoughtful about whom you choose to spend time with, but know that the Lord's providence sometimes overrules all our planning.
- x. Concluding Thoughts**
  - 1. Pray, ask for wisdom, and get to it.
  - 2. Don't feel guilty about not being able to disciple everyone. This is why we have the body of Christ.
  - 3. Make sure you are growing spiritually, and then help those around you to grow.
- b. Have Clear Aims (Chapter 8)**
  - i. Help people to understand more: LIFE→TRUTH→LIFE**
    - 1. Your discipling should help people understand more.
    - 2. We want people to grow in the knowledge of God in Christ, and faith comes from hearing the word of Christ.
    - 3. We want people to know:
      - a. Why Christians pray
      - b. Why we share the gospel
      - c. Why we join a church



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- d. Why knowledge of God's sovereignty impacts how we live
4. Discipling is not merely about accountability and behavior modification.
5. Those we disciple cannot obey what they haven't been taught.
  - a. More importantly, "The heart cannot love what the mind does not know." – Jennifer Wilkin
6. The Word of God should be central to any discipling relationship.
  - a. We're to help one another "hold fast to the word of life." (Philippians 2:16)
  - b. Encourage people to hold fast to the Word of life by reading and understanding and obeying.
  - c. You might use good Christian books in a discipling relationship, yet the best books take people to the Bible.
7. Life→Truth→Life
  - a. Your life should attract people to listen to you.
  - b. Your teaching should then work for their transformation.
  - c. Their transformed lives should then illustrate what you taught, which in turn attracts people to listen to them.
- ii. Help people to live better
  - 1. We don't only want to help people understand better, we also want to help them to live better.
  - 2. We are to be "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15)
  - 3. How do you impact how others live? By spending time with them.
    - a. So much of discipling is doing what you ordinarily do but bringing people along with you and having meaningful conversations, like Jesus did.
    - b. And when you invite them into your life, be transparent.
  - 4. You want the people you disciple to prosper in prayer, to improve in evangelism, to continue in church membership, to forbear with the members who offend them.
    - a. So often it will be the sermon preached the previous week that will allow you to work out these kinds of implications in one another's lives. Small groups can do the same.
- iii. Ask Questions
  - 1. No matter who you disciple, you want to help them better follow Jesus by growing in the knowledge of God and by learning to put that knowledge into practice – to understand better and to live better.



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2. So much depends on the specific person:
    - a. One of the first things you should do in a discipling relationship is get to know the person by asking lots of questions.
    - b. In time, the level of trust and transparency should grow, and more and more you should be able to talk about the deeper, more personal matters and what the gospel means in those areas.
  3. The “how” of discipling is not that complicated. It’s about doing life together with other people as you all journey toward Christ. We make friends and then walk them in a Christward direction.
- c. Pay the Cost (Chapter 9)
- i. Discipling takes time
    1. Not all discipling relationships look the same.
    2. They conform to the circumstances of my life and the other person’s life. And these relationships change over time.
    3. All relationships take time.
      - a. The cost of time requires us to be deliberate about discipling someone.
      - b. Time limits the number of discipling relationships we can have.
      - c. Convenience does not entirely eliminate cost. Anytime we do life-on-life relationships we give each other the gift of time.
    4. Small ways:
      - a. Talking to others after church or running errands together.
    5. Larger ways:
      - a. Scheduling weekly meals together.
    6. Some people are so willing to spend time with you that they’ll fold into your life or serve you or your family. You help to make the time worthwhile by being transparent and honest in the relationship.
  - ii. Discipling requires study
    1. If faith comes by hearing the Word, we want to feed faith with the Word.
    2. The expositional sermons you hear preached at church provide good foundations for conversations the following week.
    3. We study the things we love.
    4. Christian discipleship and discipling involves loving God with our minds.
    5. We should desire to know Him, and help others know Him, as He has revealed Himself in the Word.
    6. In your discipling relationships, use the Bible. Spend time in the Word.
  - iii. Discipling requires prayer
    1. Pray for those you’re discipling and teach them to pray.



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2. In your discipling, ask questions that help people think through what they pray about.
    - a. Do they know how to take a passage of Scripture and pray from it?
    - b. Are they spending personal time in prayer? What kind of things do they pray about? Who are they praying for?
  3. Read good books that demonstrate how to pray from Scripture, such as D. A. Carson's *Praying with Paul* and Donald Whitney's *Praying the Bible*.
- iv. Discipling requires love
1. Love initiates a discipling relationship.
    - a. It is love that constrains us to deny ourselves and serve others.
    - b. It is always love for God and others that leads us to overlook the difficulties and absorb the costs because we want to see someone grow.
  2. Love perseveres in a discipling relationship.
    - a. Why else besides love would we endure the challenges that come?
  3. Love humbly receives the criticism that often comes in a discipling relationship.
    - a. Love and vanity don't work well together.
    - b. If I'm concerned only with what the other person thinks of me instead of with how he or she is doing, it will be hard for me to love and disciple as I should.
    - c. My love for God and my friend must exceed my love for my own reputation.
  4. Love humbly gives of itself in a discipling relationship.
    - a. Love will enable you to value the other person as you should, and so give of yourself.
  5. Love allows us to end discipling relationships.
    - a. We are not God. We cannot provide everything someone needs. Maybe they need something we are not equipped to give.
    - b. We need a love that humbles us enough to recognize that what they need is not us, but God, and that God can use us for a while, and then use someone else.

## IX. Final Thoughts

- a. The aim of our lives and disciple making:
  - i. Matthew 22:37-40, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and will all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
  - ii. The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.



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- b. A means to achieving this goal:
  - i. Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."
  
- c. If I only had one year to disciple someone:
  - i. Knowing Christ (Bible Study)
  - ii. Pursuing Christ (Spiritual Formation)
  - iii. Sharing Christ (Evangelism)
  - iv. What do I teach? (Theology)
  - v. Where do I teach? (Missions)
  - vi. How do I teach? (Mentoring)
  
- d. People need to be disciplined in:
  - i. Bible study; the Gospel; Biblical Theology; Systematic Theology; the Great Commission; Ecclesiology; Spiritual Disciplines; Christian Living; Parenting; Biblical Manhood/Womanhood; Worldview; Apologetics; Church History; and Christian Biography
  
- e. A few questions:
  - i. To whom are you deliberately doing spiritual good so that he or she will be more like Christ?
  - ii. What, if anything, is keeping you from discipling others? How can you overcome this obstacle?
  - iii. What is a discipling (helping others to follow Jesus) goal you have for this year?