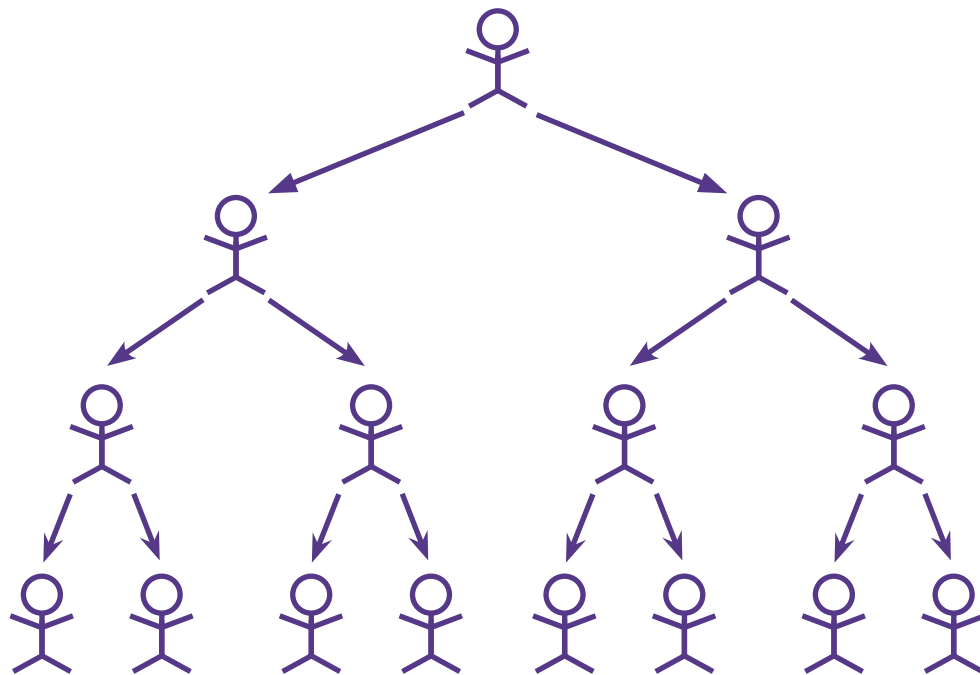


ENCOURAGEMENT FOR FRUITFUL MULTIPLIERS



Biblical Priorities, Relational Skills and Theological Insights
That Strengthen Intentional, Strategic Discipleship

Kenneth Horton, Ph.D.

ministry**catalysts**

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**All quotations from Scripture are from the NASB95 translation.*

Introduction

After a brief experience in one-on-one discipleship in high school and training in this ministry strategy during college, my years in the Air Force validated that faithful believers were often interested in this intentional growth experience. Throughout years of youth ministry, personal discipleship was a consistent focus. At that point, I assumed people would spontaneously embrace a similar commitment and begin investing in others themselves. This rarely happened because the discussions focused on progress toward maturity without a sufficient emphasis on the practical skills needed to invest in others.

When I became the lead pastor of an evangelical church in Fort Worth, Texas, the challenges of that ministry led me to the unfortunate conclusion I could no longer invest weekly time with individuals. Instead, I focused on preaching, teaching a theological foundations course with dozens of men every two years, and working with a leadership team to shepherd a growing church. Many people matured spiritually and enjoyed fruitful influence in their relational spheres. However, very few of them gained the confidence needed to pursue one-on-one discipleship that launches contagious multipliers.

My brother Ron and his wife Terri enjoyed a long pastorate that included an emphasis on discipleship. When they joined the staff of Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) to make investing in multipliers a primary focus, their enthusiasm was palpable. Our discussions led to my reluctant conclusion that small groups can help people grow spiritually but developing intentional disciple-makers is pursued more effectively in a one-on-one context. During my remaining years in local church ministry, it was encouraging to renew a focus on investing in multipliers one-on-one. Since 2011, Ron, Terri, and I (and my wife Kathy prior to her death in 2018) have been privileged to invest our lives in faithful people committed to spiritual multiplication.

A Distinctive Pattern

As we studied the Scripture and taught about discipleship at Dallas Theological Seminary and Singapore Bible College, our gratitude for the consistent example and clear teaching of Jesus and Paul regarding discipleship intensified. Jesus was *faithful to the multitudes*, teaching them the message of hope and forgiveness through His sacrificial death on the cross. He leveraged opportunities in large crowds, small groups and personal conversations (Jn. 3-4). People responded in faith to this message and began to make *incremental progress toward spiritual maturity* as they followed and learned from Jesus. Among this group of disciples, Jesus selected a dozen men who shared life with him during his earthly ministry. Even among the Twelve, Jesus had additional experiences with three key leaders: Peter, James and John (Mt.17:1-13; Mk. 5:35-43; 14:32-42). Accounts of Jesus' personal interactions with Peter (Jn. 13:6-10, 36-38; 21:15-17) are likely illustrative of numerous conversations with individual disciples during the years the group shared with Jesus. In a ministry where crowds gathered frequently, Jesus *focused his ministry on preparing a few faithful multipliers* who were entrusted with spreading the message of salvation throughout the world in a way that continues to expand twenty centuries later.

Luke often identifies followers of Jesus as disciples in his account of the expansion of the church (including Acts 9:1, 10, 19; 11:26-29; 14: 20, 22, 28). Those who know Jesus Christ by faith and are making incremental progress toward maturity are rightly called disciples. Paul was a key contributor toward the growth of multitudes of believers through his extensive travels, lengthy visits, and numerous letters. Like Jesus, Paul was *faithful to the multitudes*. Alongside this important work, Paul made a personal investment in trustworthy people like Timothy and Titus. These men were travel companions and eventual leaders dispatched to key ministries in places like Ephesus and Crete. As Paul faced execution in Rome, his final letter to Timothy encouraged ministry to unbelievers through evangelism and to all followers of Christ by preaching God's word (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Following his Savior's example and command, Paul challenged Timothy to prioritize equipping faithful people who would

invest the treasure of God's truth in other multipliers (2 Tim. 2:1-7). Jesus and Paul lived and taught the same pattern: *Be faithful to the multitudes while remaining focused on multipliers.*

Perhaps the most dramatic example of focusing on multipliers was Jesus' investment in Paul's life and ministry in the desert of Arabia (Gal. 1:11-17). This unique discipleship experience occurred in the years after Paul's conversion and before his public ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30). While the specifics are not revealed (2 Cor. 12:1-7), these years changed history and continue to shape the focus of intentional preparation of spiritual leaders. After three years nurturing a dozen key followers, Jesus transformed his most ferocious opponent into his most fruitful multiplier. Paul hints that his time of revelation with Jesus was similar in length to the years spent with the Twelve (Gal. 1:18). Even after the resurrection, Jesus' focus on multipliers continues through faithful people investing in others.

A Complementary Blessing

These aspects of discipleship are complementary, not competitive. *Incremental progress toward maturity and intentional preparation of multipliers* are both expressions of obedience to Christ's Great Commission. In a culture that values quick, quantifiable results, there is pressure to focus on tangible evidence of fruitful ministry. Noticing the numbers of people at large and small gatherings is an instinct few can resist. However, the methods that encourage progress toward maturity in group settings should be embraced alongside the challenge of identifying, preparing, and launching multipliers. This priority is time-intensive and requires a perspective rooted in a counter-intuitive confidence in the example and exhortation of Jesus and Paul. Our conviction, rooted in Scripture and experience, is that fruitful multipliers enlarge the capacity for faithfulness to believers personally and in groups of all sizes.

The purpose of this discipleship guide, *Encouragement for Fruitful Multipliers*, is to encourage faithful believers who are using *Launching Multipliers!* to equip others (available at www.ministrycatalysts.com).

However, any person involved in one-on-one discipleship may be encouraged by the underlying concepts explained in this resource.

After ten years of conversations with hundreds of faithful people, our perspective on the biblical topics, spiritual priorities and relational skills which strengthen one-on-one discipleship conversations has been sharpened. The first section provides an overview of the structure and sequence of *Launching Multipliers!* as a resource for spiritual multiplication. The next two sections focus on the priorities and skills that shape each conversation. The final section delineates theological insights to encourage lead partners in these life-changing discussions.

The Structure and Sequence of Launching Multipliers!

Launching Multipliers! is an intentional path designed to prepare people as spiritual multipliers. After decades of discipleship conversations using materials developed by Cru, Navigators, Search, and other excellent ministries, a decision was made to develop a discipleship resource that would be available online at no cost. This resulted in eighteen conversations guided by questions rooted in Scripture. Each session focuses on personal growth in the privilege of serving God. The methodology reinforces a process guided by the purpose of spiritual multiplication. Since we were created to participate in God's purposes, the truths discussed help a believer fully enjoy a relationship with God. The influence of other discipleship materials is obvious, but the impact of thousands of conversations with stimulating questions and helpful comments cannot be overstated. Questions have been sharpened, added, and in some cases deleted as we have learned from our partners.

One surprise has been the global partners who have translated these sessions into multiple languages. One professor has translated this material into two languages in his nation and incorporated them in the spiritual formation process at the seminary he serves as academic dean. A pastor in Asia has used the conversations in one-on-one discipleship, but he has also preached through these biblical concepts in the worship gatherings of his church. We celebrate any method that helps people understand and experience the joy of intimacy with God found in these transcultural biblical truths. However, the structure and sequence of the conversations is shaped by a specific purpose: *Preparing fruitful followers of Christ to equip other faithful multipliers in the distinctive context of one-on-one conversations.*

One-on-one Conversations

The emphasis on one-on-one meetings is not rooted in a biblical mandate but in the practical realities of modern life. Making adjustments in the

meeting schedules for more than two people can become complicated with last-minute work and family issues. It is challenging to maintain consistency in these conversations when only two people are managing their schedules. Adding a third or fourth person complicates this issue significantly.

Freedom to discuss personal issues (problems at home or work) may also be diminished by the presence of a third person. Although it is possible to have great trust among three or more friends, it requires all participants to have a generous measure of transparency and strong commitment to confidentiality. The conversations of a group will generally reflect the relationship with the lowest level of trust.

With only two people in a conversation, learning to express personal views is a skill that is consistently strengthened. In a group of three or more, the opportunity to voice one's thoughts is lessened. Some of the participants may be hesitant to ask all their questions, especially if one individual is substantially less knowledgeable about the Scripture than other participants. This tendency can be compounded by a participant who dominates the discussion. A less engaged person is hindered in his or her growth and the individual who dominates a conversation will be less likely to learn the value of asking questions. Becoming more like Jesus includes developing listening skills and then asking questions to help a person discuss the important issues in life.

A Consistent Pattern

These discussions build on basic truths about our salvation in Christ alone by grace alone. This blessing is enjoyed through clarity about the believer's enduring identity in Christ and security in that relationship anchored in God's faithfulness. A pivotal element is that without faith, both in becoming a follower of Christ and daily serving Him, it is impossible to please God. These concepts are frequently mentioned in sermons and other gatherings but not always discussed in ways that focus on the practical obedience that unleashes joyful fruitfulness.

Each conversation has four sections, beginning with a “What If?” situation that introduces the issue being addressed. The next section entitled “God Says What?” includes a key verse that is memorized and discussed in the context of questions (beginning with observation and moving to interpretation) about related biblical passages. The third section is “So What?” and grapples with these biblical truths in specific ways affecting our lives. The last section is “Now What?” in which both partners pursue specific obedience in light of the truths discussed.

Our sessions include a dynamic where both partners share insights about specific biblical truths. The purpose is to examine important issues and gain clarity about the perspectives of both partners. Such discussions encourage healthy ways to address honest differences. The “theological connective tissue” within each conversation stimulates faithfulness to the truths of Scripture as well as wisdom for conversations with others who are grappling with these issues.

An Intentional Structure

The resource is framed in three sections consisting of six conversations. The first is *Established for Growth* and focuses on *foundational* truths for understanding and enjoying the *privilege* of being God’s servant. These conversations may also function like a follow-up resource for young believers. The sessions were developed with the conviction many Christians seek to serve God with unwitting self-reliance yielding anxiety, anger, or arrogance. This approach often focuses on “what we are doing for God” rather than humbly depending on God as we obey. Such dependence is strengthened by confidence in God’s Word, anchored by clarity that our spiritual security is assured by God’s perfect faithfulness and experienced in harmony with our new identity in Christ. This pattern includes both the structured responsibilities (job, family, ministry) and spontaneous opportunities that unfold in the context of daily life. These sessions are designed to help new believers enjoy a strong start in personal fellowship with God as well as encourage mature believers to maximize the blessing of serving Him.

The next six sessions are entitled *Equipped for Ministry* and emphasize a consistent *focus* on biblical *patterns* that guide progress toward maturity and enlarge our capacity for spiritual impact. As believers meditate on God's character, they are encouraged to address sin with confession that strengthens both humility before God and gratitude for Christ's sacrificial death. These priorities should be joined with study of the Bible and enjoyment of the blessing of communicating with God through prayer. As God works in our lives, we enlarge our capacity to address the conflicts common in a world of hurting people. This environment of forgiveness and relational blessing enriches our opportunity to invest in multipliers.

The final section, *Empowered for Multiplication*, discusses skills and insights regarding *perspectives* that *fuel* an enduring lifestyle of relational evangelism and intentional discipleship. Believers must be prepared to share their spiritual story in a way that puts the spotlight on Jesus. This priority is energized by confidence in the way God has shaped their lives. This enlarges a believer's capacity to *focus* on fruitful ministry opportunities long term while being *flexible* to occasionally help with other needs. God's Word teaches that each follower of Christ has the privilege of blessing others while engaging in good works God has prepared (Eph. 2:10). A life of spiritual credibility requires wisdom to make decisions reflecting dependence on God and confidence in His faithfulness even through our mistakes. A wise follower of Christ embraces the perspective of a steward who will give an account to the Master. We enjoy all the assets entrusted to us with clarity that judgment of our stewardship is based on faithfulness and motivations (1 Cor. 4:1-5). Both the soberness of this accountability and the anticipation of rewards motivate a pattern of intentional discipleship that prepares others while encouraging a strong finish that honors Christ (Mt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). The eighteen sessions are designed to help a person obey Paul's exhortation to "hold fast" to sound teaching (2 Tim. 2:13; Tit. 1:9) while guiding others through the truths unpacked in *Launching Multipliers!*

Biblical Priorities for Preparing Multipliers

The intentional preparation of spiritual multipliers is shaped by key priorities. Each is rooted in both biblical instruction and practical experience. As in all spiritual endeavors, character is foundational, discernment is critical, and focus is a necessity. These priorities affirm the reality that our lives speak with more clarity than our words. Credibility in any area of life joins character with both competence and consistency. As these priorities are lived and taught, the blessings of intentional discipleship are multiplied.

The Importance of Character

The *example of a lead partner* is a thermostat that shapes the impact for both people during one-on-one conversations. This dimension of intentional discipleship is consistent with any mentoring relationship. Your words, actions and attitudes will be central elements of personal influence. Most parents discover their children will not always do what they say but almost always do what they do, especially if the doing and saying are in harmony.

Moses understood the significance of relational influence (Deut. 6:1–9). Ezra modeled this pattern when he studied and practiced the law of the Lord prior to teaching the people (Ezra 7:10). Paul's exhortation to imitate him was explained as "things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me" (Phil. 4:9). The command to "make disciples" requires authentic transmission of what Jesus taught His disciples by words and example with emphasis that the believers we equip are Jesus' disciples, not ours.

There are many ways to influence a person in a discipleship context. Being prepared for the conversations is significant. Even being on time for the meetings communicates your value of the person and the privilege of entrusting spiritual truth to a faithful partner. Consistently practicing the

truths discussed in each session is the foundation for an environment of continuing growth for both partners. The flexibility to address pressing challenges is also an opportunity to lead by example. Helping a person face a problem at home or a difficulty at work, even if the conversations in the discipleship process must be paused, will validate a commitment to prepare a person for long-term fruitfulness, not just complete a discipleship process. A significant evidence of character is when a lead partner discusses a personal struggle that demonstrates humility and encourages spiritual growth for both people.

The Impact of Biblical Obedience

Fruitful multipliers must also *engage with the specific biblical passages* discussed in each session. When the conversation, anchored in God's Word, moves from observation to interpretation to obedient application, the lives of both partners are transformed. God is eager to give the wisdom we need in the many vexing situations in life. The source of wisdom is primarily in the Bible, but God also guides us through the indwelling Holy Spirit and the counsel of godly people.

A person who asks for God's wisdom but considers obedience optional is double-minded. James warns his readers such a person is unstable and like a boat tossed about on a stormy sea (Jm. 1:5–7). When a person is willing to hear God's truth but is not committed to prompt obedience, it results in exhausting spiritual seasickness. James later reinforces this principle when he declares that hearing God's Word without doing what it says is spiritually disorienting (Jm. 1:22–25).

Each conversation focuses on cultivating commitment to God's truth joined with proactive dependence on the Holy Spirit to empower our obedience. Carefully selected portions of Scripture are probed by inductive questions embracing Ezra's pattern of study, practice, and then teach (Ezra 7:10). The focus on obedience to biblical passages is joined with a persistent emphasis on spiritual multiplication. When a believer knows that he or she will be leading discussions in a few months, there is a heightened eagerness to explore the questions and grasp the answers stimulated

each week. Within a matter of weeks prayer for faithful people leads to conversations about ways to discern a person's willingness to consider the challenges of preparing as a multiplier. While many prefer to complete the process before starting with their first partner, some are ready to begin sooner. Flexibility about the pace of your discussions (meeting twice a month rather than weekly) puts the focus on the progress and growth of the maturing partner who is ready to begin with another faithful person.

The Significance of Identifying Multipliers

The commitment required for one-on-one discipleship makes careful *identification of possible multipliers* an enduring focus. Any interaction with a growing Christian can be an opportunity to discover someone who desires to invest in other faithful people. To discern whether it is an appropriate time to initiate this process, the multiplier must confirm the friend is faithful, available, intentional, teachable, and has a heart for God's strategy of spiritual multiplication. A believer who is *faithful* can be trusted to live and explain biblical truths that will equip others. He or she must also be *available* to invest the time and focus required for this spiritual investment. Availability is often a matter of timing, not trustworthiness. A potential multiplier must be *intentional*, understanding the value of investing in people who will be able to identify and equip others. A believer who is *teachable* is willing to learn in the initial discussions with a multiplier and to continue learning from each future partner. Finally, a *heart for God's strategy for spiritual multiplication* is essential for fruitfulness in this strategic ministry. These qualities are usually found in a joyful, credible believer respected by others.

The process of identifying faithful multipliers is often initiated in casual conversations. A simple "How are things going?" can be dismissed by "Fine." It can also be an opportunity to tell a Christian friend how God is giving you encouragement through intentional discipleship. If there is interest, a brief visit will allow you to gauge interest in this rewarding experience. Another starting point is asking your friend how he or she is doing spiritually. This usually provides an opportunity for spiritual encouragement, but a friend may also ask about your walk with Christ.

If this happens, explaining the blessing of intentional discipleship would be appropriate. If the person does not inquire about your life, it may be an indicator the friend does not presently have the concern for others essential for a multiplier.

Paul's instruction to Titus about personal ministry (Tit. 2:1-8) emphasizes godly character, biblical obedience and intentional investment in others. It also establishes a pattern where men engage with men and women with women in on-going discipleship relationships. This exhortation is strongly affirmed as the path of wisdom and fruitfulness in a process that encourages consistent transparency and vulnerability.

Relational Skills for Preparing Multipliers

As a person pursues one-on-one discipleship, there are relational skills that enrich each discussion: *careful listening, asking helpful questions and engaging people with respect and interest in their perspectives*. These skills are essential in preparing multipliers and beneficial for marriage, parenting, work relationships and all ministry opportunities. They also increase the possibility of mutual understanding and diminish the likelihood of unfruitful arguments.

The significance of *leading with questions in meaningful conversations* is critical. However, the skill which provides our most helpful questions is often careful listening to others. Each session has numerous questions that encourage a vigorous discussion. However, it is the spontaneous question prompted by what is said in the meeting that often has the greatest spiritual benefit. Since learning to be a good listener and then asking questions reflecting an individual's thoughts is an important element in each session, listening is the trigger for much of the blessing in discipleship conversations. Focused listening communicates value for your partner and enlarges opportunities for mutual encouragement and spiritual growth in each discussion.

Careful Listening

There are three levels of listening which contribute to fruitful conversations: *informal, intentional and intuitive*. Each requires personal engagement rooted in a genuine interest in discovering what a person values and thinks. These levels have a cumulative benefit, with informal listening energizing intentional listening which then supports intuitive listening.

Every conversation offers opportunities for *informal listening*. Whether at work, recreation activities, the neighborhood, or your church, perceptive listening yields insights for casual conversation as well as future

discussions with spiritual significance. It is important to enjoy learning what is valued by the people in your sphere of influence. Genuine interest in a person builds an environment where that person will share a blessing, burden, or struggle which may initiate an important conversation.

The best place to strengthen informal listening skills is in your home, where life's most significant relationships are built and credibility for spiritual influence is centered. It is important to avoid disrupting the casual banter of life with a serious question, especially if it may give a person unwanted attention. However, making a mental note and inquiring about a comment privately may launch a meaningful conversation about a personal concern. Another benefit of informal listening is the discovery of opportunities for encouraging conversations. When you observe someone act or speak in a way that can be affirmed, a comment or note can have enduring impact. Good listeners enjoy hearing and watching people for the purpose of encouragement (or private exhortation).

Intentional listening is a biblical priority that strengthens relationships (Prov. 10:19; Jm. 1:19; 3:1, 12). It is an expression of respect with a dynamic impact on people. It is hard work, requiring discipline and focus not only on what is said but also on nonverbal expressions, including facial countenance, eye contact, gestures, body movements, and tone of voice. These constitute the majority of our personal communication. Patience is necessary as a listener aims at gaining insight about the other person, not just "getting to the point." A skilled listener will develop instincts sensitive to these non-verbal elements. The best listeners often make notes after a conversation in preparation for the next meaningful interaction. This kind of listening strengthens relationships and the wisdom of the listener (Prov. 17:27–28).

Intuitive listening begins by seeking insight from what is not actually said or directly expressed. As a person describes his or her situation, repeated experiences may suggest patterns that give helpful insight. Sometimes a possible cause/effect dynamic will suggest an issue that can sabotage future progress. Emotional flashes (anger, optimism, enthusiasm, or discouragement) are especially significant and may require discussion.

As you listen in this way, your gentle questions may encourage people to face what they already sense and are expressing in ways that are more instinctive than rational. In order to leverage this opportunity, a listener must value silence and resist the urge to quickly help the person beyond uncomfortable moments. As these listening skills are sharpened through experience, a person may begin to see “red flags” or sense “hunches” about what is happening in a person’s life. Resisting the tendency to assume a definitive conclusion and allowing these intuitions to guide respectful questions will help a friend explore significant issues.

It is not surprising people struggle in all aspects of listening. Listening requires focus. Since we live in a world of distraction and noise fueled by an overdose of technology, hearing is difficult and actual listening is too rare. These circumstantial hindrances mean much of what is said is missed so that answers are less helpful. Silencing the phone, finding a quiet corner, and praying for God’s help are positive preludes for any personal conversation.

Spiritual issues like anger and folly also sabotage the ability to listen and may create further damage (Prov. 14:12; 12:15; 18:2). Anger is a human reality. It is the human response to hurt in a world where everyone experiences wounds, real and perceived. Promptly addressing anger will increase the capacity to listen, especially with difficult people.

There are also personal hindrances. Even when listeners overcome the distractions noted above, they may begin to prepare an answer while processing what is being said. The focus on a response to what is being said may ambush the conversation. The mental discipline required for intentional and intuitive listening is incompatible with multitasking. It is critical to understand that people can tell when your thoughts are focused on their words. Children are especially gifted in detecting compromised attention. *When we are listening, people know it. When we are distracted, they see it before we do.*

While careful listening is significant in any relationship, it is essential for those who prepare fruitful multipliers. Listening and then asking questions

reflecting the thoughts of your partner strengthens the relationship and stimulates growth for both people. These same skills, sharpened in the format of our discussions, are also essential for gracious believers who have conversations with people who have not yet trusted Christ. Good listeners invite questions and encourage honest conversations about life's most urgent issue: experiencing and enjoying a relationship with God by faith.

Helpful Questions

In a conversation stimulated by careful listening, a good question is often more fruitful than a good answer. When you give a good answer, your partner hears only a portion of what you say and will remember only a fraction of the response in a few hours. However, a good question presents an opportunity for invigorating engagement as the person prepares a verbal response. The ideas proceeding from your partner's mouth may capture the concepts your answer would have addressed. Affirmation of your partner's discerning insights is a powerful way to strengthen their growth. At other times, what seemed reasonable and clear in his or her mind may begin to unravel as it is expressed in words. A gentle, respectful question may provide a "redo" that encourages your partner's clarity and confidence in future discussions. To put this priority in other terms, *a person usually learns more when thinking and talking about a good question than when listening to a good answer.*

Traits of Helpful Questions

Helpful questions shape fruitful discipleship conversations. There are several traits that strengthen the value of any question. An *open question* cannot be answered by "yes or no" and often stimulates additional helpful questions within a conversation. Closed questions like "Could you sell your car to pay off your debt?" may suggest a possible solution while limiting discussion of the wisdom and skills beneficial for future choices. Learning to frame open questions requires a willingness to slow down and embrace a bit of silence in order to leverage a significant interaction.

A question that is *focused* is often most beneficial. Answers may be complex but focusing a question on a single issue will help the person respond without having to remember other follow-up tangents. Additional questions may be part of a fruitful conversation but emphasizing one at a time yields greater clarity for both people.

Questions that *invite personal responses* are also most likely to address issues from the perspective of the person involved. Opportunities to understand your friend's views guide honest conversations. Questions like "How did you reach that conclusion?" or "What are possible ways you could deal with your concern?" asked with respect and gentleness defuse a sense of interrogation and move a person toward a wise next step.

Finally, questions that are *illustrated by an engaging word picture or common experience* may guide a person to new insights, especially when connected to something mentioned by the person. This encourages consideration of the issue with fresh perspective, strengthening clarity in the discussion and making insights memorable. Metaphors and other word pictures are also powerful for interactive teaching, especially when focused by stimulating questions (Mt. 7:3-6).

Purposes of Helpful Questions

There are three common purposes for questions that are fruitful in leading, mentoring, parenting or launching multipliers: *probing, revealing and clarifying*. *Probing questions* stimulate the formation of encouraging relationships. When a probing question is joined with genuine interest, people begin to communicate more openly. Such questions are most effective when connected to something a person has expressed. Jesus uses a probing question when he asks his disciples "Who do people say I am?" and then "Who do you say I am?" (Lk. 9:18, 20). If a friend shares that credit card debt has become a problem, a probing question might be "Can you describe how you normally make financial decisions?" When questions are focused by simplicity, a person often begins to communicate thoughts more clearly. The discipline to avoid suggesting a solution in the question is critical. Probing questions communicate a desire to know

and understand a person and may expose a perspective that invites other questions.

Revealing questions, often stimulated by probing questions, help move beyond a difficult issue to explore possible solutions. Revealing questions are aimed at gaining a rational response and best expressed without emotionally charged language. Jesus employs a revealing question when he asked “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is your own eye?” (Lk. 6:41). A revealing question for the friend struggling with a relationship conflict might be “What are possible ways you may have contributed to this conflict?” Such questions are maximized when they prompt a discussion that anticipates future choices related to the issue. As a range of options are explored, revealing questions may require time for reflection or even multiple conversations.

Clarifying questions are central to discovering biblical convictions leading to wise decisions. When questions guide someone toward a specific action that addresses an issue, the situation remains that person’s concern. One such question, calmly asked, is often “What do you think you should do about this situation?” For the third grader who forgot his homework, the sixteen-year-old who was ticketed for speeding, or the friend struggling with a relational conflict, helping the person assume responsibility for a wise step toward a possible solution ultimately enriches life. When ownership of the actions appropriate in the situation is specific and clear, responsibility is encouraged. When joined with dependence on God for the implementation of the decision, the benefits are both practical and spiritual.

In discipleship discussions, the lead partner should cultivate patterns that help the partner grow toward consistent responsibility. Expecting the protégé to be prepared (especially with regard to Scripture memorization) and to initiate any schedule changes promptly are part of discipleship. Accountability regarding specific steps of obedience is a significant aspect of this process. In all situations, the person facing an issue must pursue needed changes with God’s help.

Good questions offer enduring benefits. Not only does a thoughtful answer to a good question provide valuable insight for a particular situation, it stimulates the thinking skills and spiritual insights needed for circumstances when wise counsel is not readily available. Parents understand this reality as they prepare children for life. Good supervisors develop future leaders with this long-term perspective. Discipleship leaders pursue each conversation in anticipation of a partner equipping other multipliers.

If someone cannot explain their views in a conversation, it is likely they will not understand them well enough to practice the truth consistently. When coaches evaluate potential quarterbacks for college or professional teams, they usually have the player stand at a whiteboard and draw plays on the board while explaining himself. One-on-one discipleship discussions give partners an opportunity to explore spiritual truths in similar fashion in preparation for spiritual opportunities in adversarial environments.

Asking questions is also significant in conversations with people who are not yet followers of Christ. While preparation to affirm our hope in Christ is essential, the wisdom and respect encouraged by Paul (Col. 4:5-6) and Peter (1 Pet. 3:14-16) suggest helpful answers about our hope in Christ are often shaped by good questions. In fact, both of these passages assume the answers are in response to the questions (or hostile reactions) of people who do not have faith in Christ. The authenticity of a believer's life is foundational for a life that stimulates questions with answers which focus on Jesus in a persuasive way.

Respectful Conversations

When discussing spiritual issues, there is *a pattern that encourages honest conversations even if there is disagreement about spiritual matters*. Building on listening and questions, this paradigm diminishes the likelihood of an angry argument and often builds toward a fruitful discussion. It has four parts: (1) *personal affirmation*; (2) *asking questions* with the purpose of understanding the life and views of the other person; (3) *giving a helpful part of an answer* respectfully and persuasively; and

then (4) *asking another question* that allows the person to continue thinking about their views in light of the ideas expressed.

When we *affirm* a person's willingness to discuss an important issue, we are acting in harmony with theological, biblical, and relational values that honor God. Every person we meet is created in God's image as a unique expression of His purpose (Gen. 1:26–27; Ps. 139:1–6). Whether we fully understand the perspectives, agree with the opinions, or enjoy the personality of someone, they are made in the image of God. People are so precious to God that Jesus left heaven and came to earth to pay for the sin that separates them from their Creator (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:1–5; Eph. 2:1–8). When that reality is our starting point, we are released from competition, free from being offended, and focused on the long-term interests of the person.

This theological posture helps believers obey Jesus' exhortation to love people, even our enemies. As we pursue peace with others (Matt. 5:43–48), our credibility may be enlarged even when we express honest differences. This does not mean it will always be a peaceful conversation. Respectful words may provoke harsh responses. As we treat others as God commands and focus on God's grace in Christ, their reaction will not ultimately be toward us and our gracious response may be part of God's work in drawing people to Jesus.

Such an approach is not ultimately rooted in a conversational method or good intentions. It is anchored in confidence in God's faithfulness. Paul was imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial. He was guarded by a rotating cadre of Roman soldiers. At the end of his letter to the Colossians, Paul urged his readers to pray that God would open doors for a clear explanation of the Gospel with people he encountered while under arrest. Cultivating the environment of respect so pivotal to fruitful conversations requires God's wisdom and power, both of which are promised to followers of Christ. Praying for that blessing is critical for any spiritually significant conversation (Col. 4:2–6).

This attitude toward others, especially when they are hostile, must be joined with an embrace of the reality that you can learn from other people's experience, education, and even objections. When we enjoy learning from the skills and experiences of others, they sense our attitude and often become more open to ideas they would reject immediately in the midst of an argument. *Although people may not grasp the explanations we offer, they almost always sense our attitude toward them and their thoughts.*

Theological and Practical Concepts from *Launching Multipliers!*

During hundreds of discipleship conversations many of the most helpful insights have been stimulated by a spontaneous question or comment from one of the partners. These insights, anchored in Scripture and framed by God's gracious work in believers, often prompted the exclamation, "Make sure we write this down." The biblical and theological insights on each session reflect a decade of fruitful discussions.

Session 1 - Beginning A Christ-Centered Life

- Our creation in the image of the Triune God (Gen. 1:26-27; Is. 59:19-21) reveals a divine fingerprint: *unity embracing diversity unleashing creation*. This reality, reflected in marriage and the body of Christ, has profound benefit in a world confused about human purpose, marriage and sexuality.
- Satan continues to use the same strategy in temptation (Gen. 3:1-5; 1 Jn. 2:15-17) because it has been effective with every person except Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11).
- The impulse for sinners to hide from God is universal. God takes the initiative in restoring a person who finds mercy and grace through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:26-27; Heb. 4:12-16; 1 Jn. 1:9). God is the gracious initiator and believers are grateful responders.
- The rejection of the "bad news" of human sinfulness is prevalent in our world. The biblical teaching on Jesus Christ as the Savior for sinful people seems irrelevant to people who minimize sin (Eph. 2:1-9).
- Sin has sobering consequences. Adam's sin, *imputed* to every person (Rom. 5:12-17), results in physical death. A sinful nature, *inherited* by every child through the parents (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3), is revealed in sinful behavior. *Individual* sin includes actions, thoughts and motives and is the basis for judging all who do not have eternal life in Christ (Rev. 20:11-15).

- People are saved by faith alone. Our works add nothing to what Christ paid on the Cross and are never a cause for boasting. The good works God prepares for believers are empowered by His Spirit for His glory (Mt. 5:16; Eph. 2:8-10).
- The message of God's grace requires a personal response of faith in Christ's payment for our sin validated by Jesus' bodily resurrection. This faith is rational and anchored in the most logical explanation for the empty tomb after Jesus' crucifixion.

Session 2 - Grasping the Faith Process

- The necessity of faith in pleasing God (Heb. 11:6) is a pivotal truth. Each person has faith in someone or something and worships what is most valued. It is not faith in faith, but faith in God expressed in obedience to His revealed truth that pleases God (Rom. 10:17, 14:23; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20).
- Faith in what Jesus accomplished on the Cross as payment for our sin is how a person begins a relationship with God. Enjoyment of that relationship, described as fellowship with God, is also experienced by faith. *Embracing faith* daily results in spiritual stability, fruitful growth and contagious gratitude (Col. 2:6-7).
- It is important to *envision obedience* in terms of real-life situations. The starting point is often honesty about nagging areas of disobedience (1 Jn. 1:9). The greater the clarity about disobedience, the more specific the plan for obedience in God's strength.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer (1 Cor. 12:7). We live by faith as we *expect empowerment* to obey God (Eph. 1:19; 5:18).
- Both obedience and disobedience impact other areas of life. There is always collateral blessing or damage. Focusing on a very specific area of obedience will have broader positive impact, just as continued disobedience poisons other areas.
- We "work out" our salvation as God "works in" us through each step of faith (Phil. 2:12-13).

Session 3 - Building Confidence in God's Word

- God's written revelation has benefits psychologically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and morally (Ps. 19:7-11). Each time a person is guided by the Spirit through the truths of Scripture, these blessings are strengthened.
- Confidence in God's Word is supported by the witness of the Bible (Ps. 119:160; Prov. 30:5; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) and the consistent example of Jesus. The message about God's salvation through Christ was communicated through forty authors in three languages over 1500 years. No book claiming to be revelation from God has more credible manuscript evidence, broader translation, more extensive distribution or greater validation by archeological discoveries.
- Fulfilled prophecy stimulates confidence in God's Word. The primary focus of prophecy in the Old Testament is the provision of the Messiah for Israel who is the Savior of the world. Examination of these prophecies strengthens confidence in Scripture and anticipation of Christ's promised return (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Th. 4:13-18).
- The specific benefits of Scripture reflect the circumstances of a believer's life. The same passage can teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17) depending on a person's spiritual condition.
- Refusal to receive a rebuke and pursue correction leads to God's loving and painful discipline (Heb. 12:7-11). *Prompt obedience is always the path of wisdom.*

Session 4 – Appreciating Your Security in Christ

- Eternal life begins at the moment a person receives Christ by faith (Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 5:11-12) and by definition does not end (Jn. 5:24; 1 Jn. 5:13). This truth joined with the certainty the Father's temporal discipline (Heb. 12:7-11) and ultimate judgment by Christ (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:9-10) sharpens a believer's focus as God's servant.

- Our security as God's adopted child is anchored in the power and faithfulness of the Son and the Father (Jn. 10:28-29). Believers are also sealed until the day of redemption by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). This security is as certain as the perfect character of the Triune God.
- Nothing, including any part of creation, can separate God's child from His love. Every person who has received Christ by faith is a created being, so doubt, confusion or failure will not separate a believer from God (Rom. 8:15-17, 38-39).
- The Father's loving discipline of His children (Heb. 12:7-11) reflects His knowledge of all who belong to Him (2 Tim. 2:19). This discipline is painful and can lead to sickness and even death (1 Cor. 11:30).
- A believer's judgment by Christ (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:9-10) focuses on faithful service and motivates a life pleasing to Christ. Our security does not minimize this accountability.
- God's enduring commitment to conform believers to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29) will prevail over the folly of disobedient children.
- Security is related to assurance but must be distinguished from it. Security is established by what God has done for us in Christ, but assurance reflects our understanding of God's faithfulness in completing this gracious work.

Session 5 – Embracing Your Identity in Christ

- Paul declares that God's grace provides freedom from sin's domination, not freedom to continue sinning as believers united with Christ (Rom. 6:1-10).
- This new identity is explained in terms of our shared spiritual experience in Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection to live a new life by God's grace through faith. This does not mean we are not capable of sin, but we are no longer obligated to sin.
- Pursuing the patterns that strengthen union with Christ, described as abiding in Him, is a path of blessing. Consistent embrace of this identity glorifies the Father, focuses our love on Christ, fuels fruitful ministry, guides prayer and enlarges personal joy (Jn. 15:5-11).

- Our identity as a child of God will be true of us forever and is therefore the basis for a truthful self-perception which helps us maximize the opportunities of this life.
- The *trigger* for experiencing the blessing of being united with Christ is a decisive choice to embrace our new identity in Christ (Rom. 6:11).
- The *trajectory* of spiritual transformation is shaped by a daily pattern of presenting our life to God as His instrument (Rom. 6:12-23; 12:12:1-2).
- When people are complacent about sin, they will be mastered by sin. Sin results in divine discipline and destructive temporal consequences for a believer. Prompt confession of sin and restoration of fellowship with God is essential (1 Jn. 1:9).
- It is not surprising that there is conflict between our fleshly desires and our new identity in Christ. The hope for victory in this battle is found in Christ (Rom. 7:15-25) and enjoyed by dependence on God's power (Rom. 8:1-39).

Session 6 – Living in God's Presence and Power

- Jesus affirmed that the disciples (and all His followers in the centuries since) have a distinctive advantage with God the Spirit living within them (Jn. 16:7). Peter declares "God has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). These truths motivate a believer to enjoy the privilege of serving God.
- There is a daily pattern that strengthens our engagement in God's work (Jn. 5:24). The process of release, respond and restore has two primary operational outcomes: *dependence mode* or *default mode*.
- Dependence mode is a reliance on God's power as you focus on what pleases God. Living in dependence mode requires persistent focus and supernatural help.
- Beginning the day in worship (Rom. 12:1-2) helps a believer consciously *release* control to God's Spirit, reflecting a posture of obedience (Rom. 6:11-15).

- Looking for ways to be part of what God is doing (Eph. 2:10) will help a believer see opportunities clearly enough to respond in faith to what God has prepared.
- Default mode requires no intentionality. It is how people normally operate in life from their earliest moments in order to satisfy selfish desires. This pattern of self-dependence is so prevalent it initially feels normal though it eventually damages relationships and diminishes joy.
- When a person's actions are overtly sinful, there is no confusion about the need to confess our sin. However, pursuit of what is good does not necessarily mean dependence on God. Ministry that focuses on satisfying self or impressing others is sinful and disrupts fellowship with God.
- Indicators that a believer is in default mode include anxiety, anger and arrogance. Trying harder in the flesh to accomplish God's purposes may impress others or give momentary validation for the person, but the anxiety usually increases. *Anxiety stimulates stress and sabotages joy.*
- Anger is inevitable because it is the human response to hurt. Since we live in a world of hurts, we will get angry, sometimes in the midst of ministry opportunities. The question is whether we will remain angry. *Wisely and promptly addressing anger helps people continue in dependence on God (Eph. 4:15, 26-32).*
- When ministry endeavors have fruitful outcomes, a person doing the ministry can begin to enjoy the applause. *Humility expressed in confession is the consistent remedy for arrogance (1 Pet. 5:6-7).*
- Do not delay a fresh start in dependence mode. As we linger before the cross (1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Jn 1:7-2:2), resisting a "drive through" mentality, full agreement with God changes our thoughts about sin and invigorates obedience reflecting biblical repentance. *Confession is the doorway to repentance renewing humility that pleases God and gratitude that motivates fruitful ministry.*

Session 7 – Celebrating God's Character

- The conversation on God's attributes affirms that biblical thoughts about God encourage spiritual wisdom. Each element of God's perfect character strengthens humility before God and confidence in His work in our lives. Three attributes that stimulate vigorous discussion are God's omniscience, immutability and holiness.
- God's omniscience means that He perfectly knows all things, actual and possible: past, present and future through all eternity (Ps. 139:1-6; Heb. 4:13). The conversation on how this impacts our prayer life is significant. God's omniscience does not make our prayers less meaningful because He already knows what He will do. He also knows what we will pray and incorporates that reality in the outworking of a future fully known to Him. God is relentlessly focused on conforming believers into the image of His Son. He tenderly comforts us in the midst of all of life's difficulties and uses our prayers in harmony with His omniscience to fulfill this ultimate purpose.
- God's immutability means His character is unchanging and unchangeable. While He deals with each person uniquely, His attributes in all circumstances remain perfectly consistent (Num. 23:19; Jm. 1:17). God's response in certain situations is expressed in human terms that suggest a change of course (Gen. 6; Exod. 32:7-10; Jon. 3:1-10). Since God is eternal and human beings are time-bound, it is not surprising that language struggles to communicate God's unchanging character engaging with changing human circumstances. Moses, with gratitude, and Jonah, with exasperation, respond to this tension by affirming God's unchanging faithfulness and love (Exod. 32:11-14; Jon. 4:2). God's work incorporates human choices in ways that are always consistent with His perfect character.
- God's holiness joins His absolute moral *purity* with the ultimate fulfillment of His *purpose*. Our opportunity to obey God's command to "be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:15-16) must focus on the personal purity possible through the obedience empowered by the Spirit and cleansing and forgiveness provided by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Holiness is not confined to moral issues but includes fulfilling

God's purpose in fruitful ministry. A priority on both purity and purpose as expressions of God's holiness protects from unhealthy, legalistic tendencies and focuses our lives on the privilege of investing in people with a grateful heart.

- Persistent meditation on God's attributes stimulates worship (Rom. 11:33-36), gratitude (Ps. 145:1-21) and a fruitful life (Col. 1:9-12).

Session 8 – Experiencing God's Forgiveness

- As we linger at the cross, specifically agreeing with God's perspective of our sin, the truth about our problem and God's remedy in Christ (Heb. 10:10) changes our perspective on both. As we focus on God's holiness and love, our lives are transformed by faith expressed in obedience.
- God's forgiveness removes the guilt of our sin (Ps. 103:12; Mic. 7:19) and results in cleansing with no condemnation (Rom. 8:1; 1 Jn. 1:9).
- This blessing restores our fellowship with God but does not remove the relational consequences of our sin (Mt. 5:23-26). God gives grace and strength as these issues are addressed and often works in special ways when we seek the forgiveness of others.
- When sin causes a believer to focus inward toward self or outward toward others, a blend of discouragement or arrogance will stunt spiritual growth.
- Minimizing our sin or marginalizing God's holiness "shrinks" our focus on Christ (1 Cor. 2:2) and may result in being "stuck" in default mode. When Christ is our focus, ministry motivated by gratitude enlarges spiritual blessings.
- Feelings of guilt that continue after genuine confession indicate a lack of understanding or confidence in the complete sufficiency of Christ's payment for our sin once for all (Heb. 7:27, 9:12, 9:27-28, 10:10).

Session 9 - Transformed by God's Word

- Prayer is foundational for fruitful Bible study. The Holy Spirit that worked in the lives of the human authors of Scripture dwells in each follower in

Christ, guiding toward the truth that leads to fruitfulness (Jn. 14:25-26, 15:26-27; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

- A pattern of inductive Bible study focuses on the value of being “doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jm. 1:22).
- A metaphor that illustrates inductive Bible study is a mining operation. Observation is digging and sorting the spiritual treasures in a passage. Interpretation examines and determines the significance and relationships of all that is discovered. Application positions this truth for daily expression in our lives.
- The greater the investment in observation of Scripture, the clearer the insights through interpretation and the more practical the personal application.
- A key to fruitful exposition is grasping the immediate *context* of a passage of Scripture as well as its broader *connection* with biblical teaching.
- Knowing and obeying God’s Word confirms that sound doctrine and healthy living are mutually invigorating (Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 5:14; Jm. 1:5-7 and 1 Pet. 2:1-2).
- A concise summary of the key elements of truth in a biblical passage in a single sentence sharpens clarity when teaching God’s Word to others.
- God is pleased by faith expressed through obedience to the truths discovered in Scripture (Heb. 11:6). Hearing God’s Word and even deciding to respond, without doing what it says, leads to disorienting spiritual amnesia (Jm. 1:22-24). *Deciding must not be confused with doing.*

Session 10 - Communicating with God

- Prayer is communicating with a perfect Father who engages His children with wisdom and compassion (Ps. 5:1-3; 34:18; 62: 5-8; Mt. 7:7-11; Jm. 1:5-7).
- Prayer encourages us to draw near to God with confidence that His faithfulness is always greater than our frailty.

- Jesus is always praying for us (Rom. 8:34) and the Holy Spirit prays with us when we do not have a complete understanding of how to pray to the Father (Rom. 8:26-27). Since we are never aware of all that God desires, the Spirit always prays with us. We are joining a divine prayer circle each time we pray.
- Prayer involves four primary dimensions: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Each is important and prayer does not require a rigid pattern. It is often a spontaneous expression that will start, proceed and conclude differently as we pray according to the circumstances of life and our intimacy with God.
- Adoration stimulates humility, confession invigorates gratitude, thanksgiving encourages perspective and supplication strengthens peace.
- As we communicate with God in prayer, the primary means of God's communication with us is the written Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is given to guide and teach us (Jn. 14:25-26; 15:26-27) in harmony with the wisdom found in God's Word (Jn. 16:3) and focused on the Son's glory (Jn. 16:14).
- As we are still and quiet before the Lord (Ps. 46:10; 139:23-24), we may have to "work to listen" in that moment and be "willing to listen" in the hours and days afterwards. The Spirit may "nudge" us toward specific actions consistent with Scripture (to pray, encourage, or bless) which we can promptly obey. If the thought is "move your family to another city," a more intentional process (discussed in Session 15) is appropriate. In either case, *the Spirit will guide a person eager to obey with a mind focused on Scripture and open to wise counsel.*
- Remember that praying (and giving or fasting) to impress others does not please God and leads only to momentary recognition by people (Mt. 6:1-18).
- God always answers prayer with a yes, no or not yet. Prayer may be most significant when it leads to spiritual transformation even though circumstantial relief is delayed or denied. God does much of His most important work when we are in "the waiting room" of prayer.

Session 11 - Cultivating Healthy Relationships

- Three biblical patterns are foundational for healthy relationships: forgiving, blessing and pursuing reconciliation with others. These values help God's people shine brightly in a dark world (Mt. 5:16; Phil. 2:14-16).
- In a world where hurt is rampant and anger inevitable, wisely addressing anger is critical. When anger lingers, relationships are damaged and spiritual fruitfulness is compromised (Eph. 4:29-30).
- Three common anger "languages" are explosion, suppression, and passive aggression. Unresolved anger hurts people and damages relationships. Paul challenges believers to reject avoiding the issue or attacking the person by addressing anger honestly and promptly because God has forgiven them in Christ (Eph. 4:15, 26-32).
- Forgiveness is essential for healthy relationships. God is our model for forgiveness that addresses life's real hurts while making restored relationships possible.
- While forgiveness is a specific step of obedience to God, it is part of a faithful path where a posture of forgiveness is affirmed repeatedly in the emotional and relational dynamics of life. Walking the path of forgiveness is an ongoing aspect of living in dependence mode.
- Forgiveness should not be confused with trust. Forgiveness is given unconditionally because a person has received forgiveness in Christ by grace (Eph. 4:32). Trust develops in the context of honest communication and behavior (Tit. 3:10-11).
- God's Word encourages supportive fellowship with other believers. The "one another" commands of the New Testament (Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 4:7-10) contribute to healthy relationships (Rom. 12:9-12).
- Expressions of tender love are helpful in our relationships, but tough love that confronts the destructiveness of sin is also needed (1 Th. 5:14; Tit. 3:10-11). Enabling behaviors that damage people and relationships is not loving.
- Pursuing reconciliation with people we have harmed is a priority that prompts an interruption of our worship (Mt. 5:23-24). This not only

strengthens relationships, but often invites opportunities for fruitful conversations.

- Pursuing reconciliation demonstrates humility before God, commitment to healthy relationships and confidence in His grace in our relationships.

Session 12 - Pursuing Spiritual Multiplication

- Jesus and Paul modeled and commanded intentional preparation of spiritual multipliers (Lk. 6:12-19; Mt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:1-7). This focus on fruitful leaders was complementary with faithfulness to people influenced in larger groups.
- One-on-one discipleship is a distinctive form of mentoring aimed at spiritual growth while cultivating skills essential for the strategic purpose of multiplication (Mk. 6-10; Lk. 10-11). This investment in faithful people offers the blessing of both earthly and eternal rewards (2 Cor. 5:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:6; 4:7).
- Like all positive mentoring experiences, one-on-one discipleship is a mutually encouraging relationship that values a credible example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1) and consistent humility (Phil. 2:5-11; Jm. 3:13; 1 Pet. 5:5-7).
- Credibility is the fruit of character, competence and consistency. A believer's wise response to a crisis amplifies the credibility essential in fruitful discipleship.
- Identifying faithful people requires wisdom (Lk. 6:10-19; 2 Tim 2:2). This is a process that gives a person opportunity to demonstrate both faithfulness and availability. Paul's description of Timothy (Phil. 2:19-24; 1 Tim. 4:12), Titus (2 Cor. 8:16-18) and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30) are instructive for identifying a faithful person.
- Paul describes his investment in the lives of the Thessalonian believers in parenting terms: a mother's nurture and a father's discipline (1 Th. 2:7-12). Balancing tender and tough love strengthens fruitful discipleship.

- When people know that they will be discussing discipleship with another person in a few months, they prepare differently, ask questions more carefully, take notes more diligently and begin praying for their first faithful person in the initial conversation.
- These truths must be absorbed in a context that encourages transparency, strengthens accountability, and nurtures God-honoring motivations. After months discussing the truths, developing the skills, and cultivating the attitudes pursued in these sessions, an encouraging friendship will usually be formed.
- Such relationships are the “first fruits” experienced in this life by those who invest in others (2 Tim. 2:6). While the heavenly rewards are greater (1 Th. 2:19-20; 1 Tim. 6:17-19), this appetizer of future blessings is a motivation to continue in serving God by equipping others.

Session 13 - Spotighting Jesus Through Your Story

- Jesus calls his followers “witnesses” (Acts 1:8), indicating the significance of first-hand knowledge in sharing the message of the Gospel with others. What we have experienced personally provides a context for a message that focuses on Christ’s payment for our sin (Jn. 5:24).
- This changed life unleashes the aroma of Christ, a fragrance of life to some and the stench of death to others (2 Cor. 2:14-16). While the response to our life and message about Jesus is uncertain, our motivation is compelling: If He died for us, we should live for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15).
- With the mindset of an ambassador, we represent Christ in a realm that is hostile to Him and His followers (Jn. 15:18-21) and foreign to us (2 Cor. 5:20-21). We are faithful in this privilege when we express love even toward adversaries (Rom. 12:14-21), following Jesus’ example of sharing the hope of eternal life with those who do not yet know the Savior (Mk. 2:15-17).
- In this challenging environment, Paul exhorts his readers to demonstrate grace and persuasiveness (Col. 4:5-6) as they share this message with others.

- A respectful and gentle answer to those hostile or curious about our hope in Christ (1 Pet. 3:14-16) requires preparation. One way is to develop a brief summary of your story with a clear explanation of the message of the Gospel.
- There are three elements which *form the frame for your story*: your life before trusting Christ, the message you understood when you trusted Christ as Savior and how knowing Christ has changed your life. Several sentences on each part with the focus on a brief, clear explanation of the Gospel will leave a person thinking about Jesus after your story tweaks their interest.
- A personal testimony leverages the reality of our life experience to be a witness and ambassador for our Savior. Whether your story is calm or chaotic, there are people who will connect when you are honest about your life with gratitude to Christ.

Session 14 - Enjoying Your Shape as You Serve Christ

- The concept of a believer's SHAPE emphasizes five aspects of life that affect our fruitful engagement in ministry: **S**piritual Gifts, **H**eart (or passion), **A**bilities, **P**ersonality, and **E**xperiences. Scripture affirms the unique creation of each person (Ps. 139:13-18; Jer. 1:4-5) and teaches that a follower of Christ has the privilege of blessing others through good works prepared by God (Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 12:7).
- Resources that help a person explore spiritual gifts and personality tendencies are available online and at many evangelical churches. Identifying abilities, heart, and experiences can be pursued through personal reflection and honest interaction with close friends about how you best contribute at work, home or ministry environments.
- Understanding of our distinctive SHAPE requires an availability to serve in ministry to others. This encourages a range of ministry experiences that make an assessment possible. As a believer serves others, God begins to work in ways that may increase both personal joy and the blessing of others. With God 's wisdom and the counsel of mature friends, decisions about ministry involvement can be clarified.

- People who know their SHAPE have confidence to *focus* on pursuing opportunities where their SHAPE strengthens others. This also encourages *flexibility* to respond briefly to urgent needs and *freedom* to say no to long-term commitments incompatible with a person's SHAPE.

Session 15 - Making Decisions with God's Wisdom

- Knowing and obeying the clear truths of God's Word are first steps for a life guided by God's grace (Jm. 1:19-22).
- When we disobey God's Word in our daily life and then ask for wisdom, this leads to being "double-minded." While God may mercifully give wisdom, the capacity to receive it is compromised, resulting in confusion (Jm. 1:5-7).
- God's wisdom helps people discover guidance for important life decisions. This blessing is best experienced when a posture of preemptive obedience is sustained by living in dependence mode.
- As we pray for God's guidance (with our spouse, if married), we allow God to guide our thoughts and conversations. Scripture may provide truth directly relevant to a decision. If a decision raises no direct biblical issues, impact on family or ministry priorities require consideration since they are always significant.
- A decision needs to be evaluated in light of God's enduring purpose for our lives to glorify Him (Mt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1). Choices that affect living with biblical values as a follower of Christ must be viewed through this lens.
- It is important to seek the counsel of mature people (Prov. 12:15, 15:22, 19:20). This is not a short cut to a wise decision since counselors often give different perspectives. *Wise counselors help a person ask the right questions so they can move forward with confidence in God's guidance.*
- A final question is appropriate: *What do I desire?* When a person has sought God's wisdom, motivations are often shaped by the "delight in the Lord" enjoyed during the decision process (Ps. 37:3-4).

- If a decision is made and it becomes obvious that confusion or disobedience led to a poor choice with hard consequences, God will not waste this situation. Some of the wisest counselors gained their most helpful insights from poor decisions.

Session 16 - Maximizing Your Investments

- Human beings were created by God as stewards of His creation (Gen. 2:15-17) and followers of Christ are stewards of ministry focused on Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 4:10).
- As stewards we are responsible to use tangible, temporal, relational, and spiritual assets entrusted to us by God. Our judgment before Christ is based on faithfulness and motivation in using these blessings (1 Cor. 4:25).
- Wisdom for each aspect of stewardship is clearly revealed in Scripture. Tangible resources require awareness of our vulnerability to greed and the distraction, uncertainty, and brevity inherent our use of material blessings (Eccl. 5:1-15).
- Temporal assets are a balance of consistency and diversity. Every person receives an equal daily gift of hours, yet no person knows how many days will be given. Each day provides opportunities that matter in the moment and forever (Eccl. 9:10; Eph.5:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).
- Relational assets are precious because people are made in God's image and will exist for eternity. This stewardship is expressed as we forgive, bless and pursue reconciliation with others. It shapes our enjoyment and influence in relationships.
- Spiritual assets are maximized as we make the most of our SHAPE to encourage and equip believers for ministry to others (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:11-13).
- The judgment of a believer's service and stewardship of God's assets (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:9-10) is not focused on sin. Sin has completely been addressed through Christ's death on the cross. Any focus on a believer's sin at the judgment will address the reality that sin diminishes faithful service of God.

Session 17 - Sustaining Motivation for Spiritual Multiplication

- Christ's judgment of believers results in rewards for faithful service (Mt. 6:19–21; 1 Cor. 5:5–15; 1 Tim. 6:17–19). This reality makes each day a gift that matters for eternity in an earthly life that is like a vapor (Jam. 4:14).
- As stewards we make our choices, but we do not choose our consequences. God will not be mocked, because each person will reap what is sown (Gal. 6:7). The tragic impact of rejecting God's guidance in this life is seen in painful relationships, chaotic consequences, and, for believers, the certainty of God's discipline (Gal. 5:19–21; Heb. 12:4–11).
- Obedience to God strengthens relationships (Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 3:12–25) while unleashing blessings (Jn. 15:5–11; Phil. 2:1–4) and enriching life (1 Tim. 6:17). It is a temporal taste of the joy reserved for us in heaven (1 Tim. 16:19).
- These rewards are associated with crowns in Scripture, including the crown of life (Jam. 1:12; Rev. 2:10), the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), the imperishable crown (1 Cor. 9:25), and the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:2–4). These tangible rewards for specific aspects of faithful ministry will be cause for joyful worship.
- A believer's crowns are symbols of an enduring reality. In fact, when the twenty-four elders lay their crowns before God as an act of worship (Rev. 4:10–11), it seems obvious that the throngs in heaven will join in this worship. God deserves all glory and honor for any ministry empowered by His Spirit.
- These tangible rewards will give way to the reality that the *most treasured rewards of heaven are relational*. The privilege of fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer will overwhelm the blessings of being faithful in heavenly responsibilities or enjoying the glories of the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1–5; 10–27; 22:1–6).
- We will share His joy with all who are joint heirs with Christ. This will be magnified as believers see how God worked in our relationships with people. Any ministry done to impress people or manipulate God will be refined by fire while faithful service motivated by gratitude to God will be an enduring joy (1 Cor. 3:10–4:7).

- People saved “escaping through the flames” will be in heaven (1 Cor. 3:15). There will be no envy, but each believer’s joy will be shaped by the spiritual investments of their life.
- Believers who faithfully served God will experience heaven’s celebrations with the delight of personal participation in God’s gracious work. Those they nurtured and equipped will be a relational reward described as a crown and joy (1 Th. 2: 19-20). *Such spiritual investments enlarge our capacity for joy both now and forever.*

Session 18 - Nurturing Spiritual Multipliers

- The Scripture describes serving Christ as a race. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, *the perfect model of endurance* (Heb. 12:1-3), we finish strong.
- When we remember God’s *salvation in the past*, His *power in the present* hardship and His *glory in the future*, we know it is too soon to lose heart (2 Cor. 4:1-18).
- Embracing the perspective of the heavenly future prepared for us helps us steadfastly continue with abundant hope (Jn. 14:1-3; Col. 3:1-4).
- Faithfulness to individuals personally and in group settings is strengthened by a consistent focus on preparing fruitful multipliers.
- Jesus and Paul modeled “constrained availability” (Mk. 6:45-52; Lk. 9:1-6; 1 Tim. 1:3; Tit. 1:5), putting their disciples in situations where they must depend on God without their mentor physically present. Trust in God “alone” ramps up the pace of growth in both faith and skills.
- A consistent example of humility, integrity and transparency is foundational for launching multipliers. The purpose is to prepare a spiritually influential person, not complete a program. Paul’s description of Timothy and Titus emphasized their example, enthusiasm and fruitful ministry (1 Tim. 4:12-16; 6:6-10; Tit. 2:7-8).
- Preparing multipliers yields relational blessings during and after the regular meetings. Finding ways to encourage those who have been launched as multipliers leverages these blessings. Studying books, sharing mission trips, partnering in local ministry and building family

friendships are ways to enrich this partnership which is an appetizer of eternal joy better than we can imagine (Eph. 3:20-21).

Our prayer is that these reminders will strengthen the skills, refresh the insights and renew the motivations you developed while discussing *Launching Multipliers!* We are grateful for your faithfulness and eager to celebrate God's wisdom and goodness together forever.

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