A DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Fruit That Will Remain

From first contact to multiplying disciples

by Patrick Connolly

> *"Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing."* — John 15:4–5
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> *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."* — Mark 12:30

A training guide for disciples and disciple-makers: for reading alone, in a discipleship relationship, or in a training group.

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Foreword: The First and Greatest

A lawyer once tested Jesus with a question: which commandment is the greatest? Jesus did not hesitate. He did not name the Great Commission. He did not talk about mission or multiplication or reaching the nations. He said: love God. With everything you have. Heart, soul, mind, strength.

Then he added a second, like it: love your neighbor as yourself.

Everything else hangs on those two. Not the other way around.

This guidebook is for churches, and for Christians, who want to make disciples. That is a good and right desire. But if it is read as a manual for building a movement, it will miss the point entirely, and the people reading it will end up exhausted and empty. Movements are God's business. Our business is much simpler and much harder: to love him, to know him, to be with him — and to let that overflow into the lives of the people around us.

Disciples are not projects. They are people. Made in the image of God, loved by God, often wounded by the world, often confused about who they are and what they are for. Walking with another person toward Christ is not a program you run. It is a relationship you inhabit. It costs time. It costs honesty. It costs the willingness to be known yourself, not just to know the other.

The Great Commission — go and make disciples of all nations — comes at the end of Matthew, after three years of Jesus loving twelve specific, difficult, surprising human beings. He did not teach them discipleship theory. He took them fishing. He ate with them. He rebuked them when they were wrong. He wept in front of them. He showed them what it looks like when a human being is fully alive to God.

That is still the method.

So read this guidebook slowly. Sit with the scripture passages before you read what is written about them. Let the Word go further in than the page. And keep returning to the question that matters most: are you loving God with everything you have? Because if that is alive, the rest will follow. And if it is not, no amount of discipleship activity will produce the fruit you are hoping for.

> *"We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I also labor, striving with all His energy working powerfully within me."* **— Colossians 1:28–29 (BSB)**

Notice what Paul says he is striving for. Not a result. A person. Him. Proclaimed. And people — specific human beings — presented to him, mature, whole, loved.

That is what this guidebook is for. Not a strategy. People. And people for his glory.

How to Use This Guidebook

This is not a workbook to fill in and finish. It is a guide for a journey that takes years, and the journey is with real people, not through a curriculum. Use it accordingly.

Alone

Read one chapter at a time. Read the scripture passages in full, in your Bible, before reading the commentary. Write out your answers to the reflection questions — not to complete an exercise, but because writing forces you to be specific, and vagueness is the enemy of formation. Bring your questions and your resistances to your discipleship community.

In a discipleship relationship

Meet weekly. Each person reads the chapter before you meet. Open with the simple question: what struck you? Not what did you learn — what struck you. Then let the conversation go where it needs to go. The reflection questions are starting points, not an agenda to complete.

In a training group

One chapter or section per session. The leader's job is not to teach the material — it is to create space for the group to encounter it together. Read scripture aloud. Ask questions. Leave silence. Let the Word do what the Word does.

FOR THE LEADER

The measure of a discipleship session is not whether you covered the content. It is whether people left more honest, more hungry, and more connected to God and one another than when they arrived.

Part	Theme	Central question
One	The two great commandments	What is this actually all about?
Two	Going out — incarnational love	How do we cross into the world?
Three	Sowing — genuine witness	How do we speak truthfully?
Four	Harvest — conversion and baptism	What actually changes?
Five	Establishing — foundations	How do we build on solid ground?
Six	Maturing — abiding and fruit	How do we stay connected to the vine?
Seven	Multiplying — disciples who disciple	How do we give away what we've received?
Eight	Pitfalls and warnings	Where does this go wrong?
Nine	Calling — unlocking God's purpose	What has God made this person for?

PART ONE

The First and Greatest

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Mark 12:30

Chapter 1: Love God First

The question that started everything

A teacher of the law came to test Jesus. He had heard the debates between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He had heard Jesus answer well. So he asked the question that sat beneath all the others: of all the commandments, which is the first?

Jesus answered without hesitation. He did not say: go. He did not say: make disciples. He did not say: preach the gospel. He said: love the Lord your God. With all your heart. All your soul. All your mind. All your strength. This is the first. There is no other commandment greater than this.

Then the second: love your neighbor as yourself.

Everything else — every commission, every calling, every act of service or witness or sacrifice — hangs on these two. If you build a discipleship ministry without this at the center, you are building something that will eventually hollow out. The workers will burn out. The fruit will be thin. The people you invest in will learn to do the tasks without knowing the Person.

> *Jesus replied, "This is the most important: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."* **— Mark 12:29–31**

What Jesus says is first

He quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-5 — the Shema, the central confession of Jewish faith. This was not a new answer. Every faithful Israelite knew these words. They said them morning and evening. They wrote them on their doorposts. The law was clear.

What Jesus does is name it as the hinge on which everything else turns. Not a duty among duties. The first. The one from which all others flow.

This matters enormously for how any church approaches discipleship. The question we must keep asking is not: how many people are we reaching? It is: are the people in our community actually growing in love for God? Is there a deepening desire for him? A thirst that only he can satisfy? Because disciples who do not love God will not make disciples who love God. You cannot give what you do not have.

With all your heart

The heart in Hebrew thought is not the seat of feeling. It is the seat of the will — the center of the person, where decisions are made. To love God with all your heart is to want him. To choose him. Not as a background preference but as the governing desire of your life.

David is the biblical portrait of a heart wholly turned toward God — and David was a man of tremendous failure. What made him a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22) was not his moral record. It was the direction his heart ran when he fell. He ran back. Psalm 27:4 — 'One thing I have asked of the LORD; this is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.' One thing. Not many good things. One.

With all your soul

The soul is the whole living person — the breath that makes you alive, the self that continues beyond the body. To love God with all your soul is to love him with your very existence, not just your religious activity. It is the difference between someone who goes to church and someone for whom God is the reason they get out of bed.

The Psalms are the literature of soul-love. Psalm 63:1: 'O God, You are my God. Earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You. My body yearns for You in a dry and weary land without water.' That is soul-love. It is not calm. It is hungry. And hunger is what a healthy soul feels toward God.

With all your mind

This is the commandment that challenges the anti-intellectual streak in some forms of Christianity. God does not ask for a suspended intellect. He asks for an engaged one — turned fully toward him. Loving God with your mind means thinking about him. Reading about him. Wrestling with hard questions about him. Bringing your doubts honestly rather than burying them.

Romans 12:2 — 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind.' The mind is a battleground. The surrounding culture is constantly offering its own account of reality — what matters, what you are for, what is true. To love God with your mind is to submit that battleground to him. To let his Word reshape the way you see everything.

With all your strength

Strength is the body, the energy, the practical daily effort of a life. Loving God with your strength means the way you work, rest, spend, move through your week — all of it offered to him. Not religious activity. Ordinary life, given to an extraordinary Person.

This is the part that most discipleship teaching neglects. We focus on prayer and Bible reading and church attendance. But Paul writes that whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, "do it all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). The whole life is the offering.

The second is like it: love your neighbor

Jesus connects the two commandments with the word 'like.' Not 'and then.' Like. The second flows from the first. When you are genuinely loving God — when your heart is alive to him, your thirst is for him, your mind is shaped by him — love for people is not something you have to manufacture. It comes. Because God loves people, and when you are close to him, you begin to see them the way he does.

This is the correction to a certain kind of discipleship culture that produces people who are devoted to God but cold toward others, or devoted to mission but disconnected from genuine love. The second commandment is not a separate track. It is the overflow of the first.

And the reverse is also true. You cannot love your neighbor with any sustained depth without loving God. Human love — even the best of it — is limited, conditional, exhaustible. We run out. We get hurt and close down. We love the easy people and avoid the difficult ones. Only love that is sourced in God can hold when the person we are loving disappoints us, costs us, stays broken longer than we expected.

> *"We love because He first loved us."* **— 1 John 4:19**

That verse is the whole engine. We are not the origin of love. We are its recipients, and therefore its carriers. The disciple who is not regularly receiving — through prayer, through the Word, through the gathered community, through the Lord's Table — will eventually have nothing to give.

People are not the goal. God's glory is.

This needs to be said plainly, because it is easy to get wrong.

People matter infinitely. Every person you will ever meet is made in the image of God, loved by God, and of inestimable worth. This guidebook is written to help you walk faithfully with people. Nothing in the following pages should be read as treating people as means to an end.

But people are not the final goal. God's glory is. We make disciples not because it fulfills a missional vision or builds a healthy church. We make disciples because God is worthy of the worship of every nation, tribe, people, and language — and the people around us were made to know him and glorify him and enjoy him forever. When a person comes to know Christ, the joy is not that we succeeded. The joy is that another human being has begun to live what they were made for.

The end of the whole story is not a global movement. It is a gathered multitude around the throne, singing to the Lamb. The mission exists to serve that worship, not the other way around.

> *"You were slain, and by Your blood You purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God."* **— Revelation 5:9–10**

That is the destination. Read everything else in this guidebook with that in mind.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Sit with Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Mark 12:28-34 side by side. What does it mean that Jesus quotes the Shema as his first answer?

Where in your life is love for God genuinely alive? Where has it grown thin? Be honest.

Think of the people you are walking with. Do you love them — not as a project but as a person? What does your love for them look like when they disappoint you?

What would it change in your discipleship relationships if the goal were God's glory rather than their growth?

PART TWO

Going Out — Incarnational Love

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."

John 1:14

Chapter 2: God Came Out

The movement that started everything

Before there was a church, before there was a mission, before there was a disciple, there was a movement: God toward us.

When Adam and Eve hid in the garden, God came looking. He called out: "Where are you?" He did not wait to be found. He crossed into the shame and the hiding. That is the first outreach in scripture — and it is God doing it.

Everything that follows in the Bible is the continuation of that same movement. God going toward people. Not a program. Not a strategy. A Person, crossing distance to find other persons.

John 1:14 is the fullest expression of it: the Word became flesh. The eternal Son of God took on a body — a specific, limited, tired, hungry, thirsty, mortal body — and lived among us. In a particular town. In a particular century. In a family that had to flee to Egypt as refugees. Among a people under occupation.

He did not build a beautiful meeting place and invite the world in. He came out.

What the prophets show us about going

Isaiah: formed before sent

Isaiah 6 gives us the order. Isaiah sees the Lord, high and exalted. The seraphs cry holy, holy, holy. Isaiah is undone: "Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips." A coal from the altar touches his mouth: "your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for."

Then the call: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?" And Isaiah's answer: "Here am I. Send me!"

The sending comes after the encounter, after the brokenness, after the cleansing. This is not a small detail. The person who goes before they have been before the throne of God goes in their own strength. And their own strength will not be enough.

Jeremiah: called before he knew it

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I set you apart" (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah's calling preceded his existence. God's purpose for him was not something he discovered and then applied for. It was something he was born into.

His objection — "I surely do not know how to speak, for I am only a child!" — is the honest response of someone who actually grasps what they are being asked. And God's answer is not: do not worry, you will be fine. It is: "I am with you to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:8). The call is not about personal adequacy. It never is. It is about the presence of the One who sends.

Jonah: the warning we need

Jonah received his call explicitly and ran the other direction. The book of Jonah is in the canon because the story of the reluctant servant is the story of all of us in some form. We have preferences about who deserves the gospel. We have geographies of comfort we do not want to leave. We have people we would rather God did not save.

Jonah's real problem was not disobedience. It was that he did not want the Ninevites to receive what had been given to him. The mercy that found him in the whale — he wanted to withhold it from the people God sent him to.

The disciple who will not cross into the life of someone very different from themselves is more like Jonah than like Jesus. And it is worth asking honestly: who are your Ninevites?

Jesus sends into people's actual lives

Luke 10:1-9. The seventy-two are sent two by two into specific towns and households. Not into synagogues or meetings. Households. They are told to look for a person of peace — someone whose openness creates a way into a whole network of relationships. They are told to eat what is set before them. To stay. To heal the sick. To say: "The kingdom of God is near you."

Not: come to our meeting and hear about the kingdom. Near to you. Here. In your home. In your neighborhood. In your ordinary life.

This is what incarnational love looks like in practice. Not an event you invite people to. A presence you bring into their world.

> *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest."* **— Luke 10:2**

The first instruction Jesus gives is not: go. It is: pray. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers. The movement into the world begins on your knees, not on your feet.

What distance are you refusing to cross?

Jesus crossed every distance the culture of his time erected. He went through Samaria when Jews went around it. He touched lepers when the law said do not. He ate with tax collectors when respectable people refused. He spoke to the Samaritan woman in public when his own disciples were surprised.

None of these crossings were comfortable. All of them were love.

The question for every disciple is not: do I agree with the principle of incarnational outreach? The question is: what distance in my own city, my own street, my own workplace am I refusing to cross? What kind of person have I decided, functionally, is not worth the discomfort?

WATCH FOR THIS

Waiting until you feel ready — there is no point of readiness that comes before going. The readiness comes in the going.

Going to people like you — Jesus consistently crossed the distances others refused. The gospel has always traveled across unlikeness.

Activity as a substitute for presence — running an event is not the same as being genuinely present in someone's life.

Going without praying — the harvest belongs to God. He sends workers. Begin there.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Read John 1:1-14 slowly. What does it cost God to become flesh? What does that tell you about the value he places on being present with people?

Who are your Ninevites — the people you would rather not be sent to? Name them honestly before God.

What would one act of incarnational presence look like in your life this week? Not a program. A person. A crossing of distance.

Pray Luke 10:2 daily for one week. Pay attention to what shifts in you.

PART THREE

Sowing — Genuine Witness

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,
so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Colossians 4:6

Chapter 3: Speaking the Truth in Love

You plant. Apollos waters. God gives the growth.

1 Corinthians 3:6-9. Paul is correcting a church that has developed factions around its leaders — I follow Paul, I follow Apollos. His answer reframes the whole thing. What is Paul? What is Apollos? Only servants through whom you came to believe. The planting and the watering are real, necessary work. But the growth belongs to God.

This removes the weight that crushes most witness workers. You are not responsible for the outcome. You are responsible for faithfulness. You plant the seed and care for the soil. Whether and when it grows is not yours to control. This is good news, because it means you can be present with a person for a long time — through many conversations, much patience, no visible result — without losing heart. You are not failing. You are farming.

Jesus at the well: what a gospel conversation actually looks like

John 4:1-42 is the most detailed account we have of Jesus opening a gospel conversation with a stranger. Read it slowly.

He is tired. He sits down by a well in the middle of the day. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water. He asks her for a drink. That is the opening — not a proclamation, not an invitation, not a prepared question. A simple human need, expressed honestly.

She is suspicious. Jews don't ask Samaritans for things. He takes her suspicion seriously and keeps talking. He speaks of living water. She is practical: you don't even have a bucket. He is patient. She begins to be curious. He moves closer to the real thing.

Then he names what she has not said: "you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband." He does not say it to condemn her. He says it to show her that he sees her — the real her, the hidden her, the one who comes to the well at noon when other women are not there. He knows, and he has not walked away.

She tries to redirect to a theological argument about worship. He answers it — but briefly, because the argument is not the point. The point is him. And when she says: I know the Messiah is coming — he says: "I who speak to you am He."

That is the whole conversation. An hour, maybe. From a request for water to the revelation of the Messiah. And she goes back to the city and says to the people there: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." The truth about her life, spoken with love, becomes the testimony that opens a whole town.

Each person

Colossians 4:6 ends with a word that most people rush past: "so that you may know how to answer everyone." Not: so that you know how to give the standard answer. So that you know how to answer everyone — each person, one at a time.

Every person you speak with about Christ is a specific human being with a specific history, specific wounds, specific questions, specific resistances. Some need to hear about forgiveness. Some need to understand who Jesus is before they can make any sense of what he has done. Some need to sit with the reality that there is a

God who made them and loves them. Some are in a theological argument. Some are in grief. Some are quietly desperate and do not know it.

A script cannot reach a person. Only a person can reach a person. Which means the first thing you need in any witness conversation is not the right words. It is genuine interest in the human being in front of you. What is their life actually like? What do they actually believe? What do they actually want?

Listen before you speak. Ask before you answer. Be curious about this specific person, not about whether the conversation is going the way you hoped.

Philip and the Ethiopian: following the thread

Acts 8:26-40. The Spirit tells Philip to go to a specific road at a specific time. He goes. He finds a man — an Ethiopian official, riding home from Jerusalem, reading Isaiah 53 aloud. The Spirit says: "Go over to that chariot and stay by it."

Philip runs alongside and asks: "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The man says: "How can I … unless someone guides me?" And he invites Philip in.

The passage he is reading is Isaiah 53 — the suffering servant. Who is the prophet talking about? Philip begins where the man already is. He does not introduce a new topic. He takes the thread the man is already holding and follows it to Jesus.

That is the gift to look for in every witness conversation: the thread the person is already holding. The question they are already asking. The longing they are already feeling. You do not have to manufacture the opening. You have to be awake to the one that is already there.

WATCH FOR THIS

Running a script — people can tell when they are being processed through a procedure rather than genuinely met.

Talking more than listening — you cannot find the thread if you are not paying attention to the person.

Pressure for a decision — Paul planted and watered without controlling the growth. Do the same.

Witness without prayer — Philip's conversation was Spirit-led. That requires a life of prayer, not just good technique.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Read John 4:1-42 in one sitting. What do you notice about how Jesus listens before he speaks? Where does he meet her before he challenges her?

Think of the last meaningful conversation you had with someone who does not know Christ. What was the thread they were already holding?

What is the difference between gracious and salty speech (Col 4:6)? Where does your witness tend to lean — more gracious without depth, or more salty without warmth?

Write out your own story of coming to faith in three minutes or less, in language that someone with no church background could follow.

PART FOUR

Harvest — Conversion and Baptism

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

Acts 2:38

Chapter 4: What Actually Changes

Repentance is not improvement

Metanoia. A change of mind so complete it changes direction. This is what Jesus calls for in Mark 1:15: "Repent and believe in the gospel!" Not: improve and believe. Not: try harder and believe. Turn around and believe.

Genuine repentance is a turning. The person was walking one way — toward their own sovereignty, their own version of life, their own account of what is real and what matters. And something breaks that open. The Spirit moves. The Word lands. Something in them sees, possibly for the first time, that they have been walking away from the only One who can give them what they actually want. And they turn.

This cannot be manufactured. You can create a moment. You can give an invitation. You can explain the gospel clearly and invite response. But the turn itself — the genuine metanoia — is a work of the Spirit in a person's heart. John 3:8: "The wind blows where it wishes. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

This means the person who leads someone to faith is not the agent of their salvation. They are the servant of the One who is. That is a very freeing place to work from.

> *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!"*
> **— 2 Corinthians 5:17**

Baptism: buried and raised

Romans 6:3–4: "Or aren't you aware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life."

This is what baptism is. A funeral. And a resurrection.

It is not a ceremony that marks completion of a course of study. It is not a public declaration that you have been attending church. It is an enactment of the gospel in the body of the person being baptized. You go under the water as someone who has died with Christ. You come up as someone raised with him. The old life is gone. A new one has begun.

This is why baptism in the New Testament happens immediately upon faith. The Ethiopian eunuch sees water by the road and says: "What is there to prevent me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). The jailer in Philippi is baptized in the middle of the night, the same hour he believes (Acts 16:33). The three thousand at Pentecost are baptized the same day.

Every church should think carefully about what it communicates when baptism is delayed, held back for a scheduled occasion, or treated as a graduation rather than a death and resurrection. The meaning is in the act. Every week of delay is a week in which the new believer lives without the public enactment of what is already true of them in Christ.

The Nicodemus problem

John 3. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a teacher of Israel. He comes to Jesus at night. Perhaps he is afraid to be seen. Perhaps he is one of those people whose questions only surface in the dark.

He opens graciously: Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God. Jesus goes straight past the courtesy to the thing that matters. "Truly, truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Nicodemus has done everything right. He knows the law. He has kept it. He is respected, educated, religious. And Jesus is telling him that none of that is the same as being born of the Spirit.

This is a pastoral warning for every church. A congregation is not automatically a community of born-again disciples. Some of the longest-attending, most theologically articulate people in the room may be, like Nicodemus, yet to have encountered the living God in the way that produces new birth. Gentleness here. Not suspicion. But the question must not be avoided: have you been born again? Not: have you been attending? Not: have you been baptized? Born again.

Name the cost before, not after

Luke 14:28–31. "Which of you, wishing to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost to see if he has the resources to complete it?" "Or what king on his way to war with another king will not first sit down and consider whether he can engage with ten thousand men the one coming against him with twenty thousand?"

Jesus says these things immediately after his hardest discipleship sayings — about hating father and mother, about carrying a cross, about giving up everything. He is not being cruel. He is being honest. And the disciple-maker who withholds this honesty at the point of conversion does the new believer real harm.

People who come to faith without knowing what they are entering fall away when the cost arrives — and the cost always arrives. The family that reacts with hostility. The friendship group that pulls away. The habit that does not surrender easily. The prayer that is not answered the way they expected. These are not unusual obstacles. They are the ordinary texture of following Jesus.

Name them beforehand. Not to discourage. To prepare. And to trust that the person is strong enough to receive the truth about what they are stepping into.

WATCH FOR THIS

Shallow conversion — a prayer without genuine repentance produces nominal Christians who inoculate those around them against the real gospel.

Delayed baptism — treating a decisive act of Scripture as a scheduled program event empties it of its meaning.

Unnamed cost — protecting people from the truth about discipleship leaves them unprepared for the ordinary difficulties of the life.

Assuming conversion — never check whether long-attending members have actually been born of the Spirit. Ask gently. Ask honestly.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Sit with Romans 6:1-14. What does it mean that you have died? How does that change how you think about your ongoing life?

What is the practice in your church around baptism timing? Does it reflect the New Testament pattern? What would need to change?

Think of someone you have walked toward faith. Did you name the cost before they crossed? What would you do differently?

Who in your community might be a Nicodemus — long attending, religiously fluent, but possibly not yet born of the Spirit? How do you approach that with gentleness and honesty?

PART FIVE

Establishing — Foundations of the New Life

"Just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him."

Colossians 2:6–7

Chapter 5: The First Year

Do not leave them alone

The most dangerous period in a new believer's life is the first three months. They have left something — a network of relationships, a set of habits, a way of understanding themselves — and they have not yet put down roots in the new life. They are exposed.

Paul knew this. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 reveals his genuine anguish about new believers facing trials without support. He sends Timothy specifically to strengthen and encourage them — not because the doctrine might slip, but because people in early faith need someone present with them. The orphaned new believer is the enemy's easiest target.

The first act of faithfulness to a new convert is simple: stay close. Be reachable. Check in. Eat together. Pray together. The content can be built over time. The relationship must be present from the beginning.

Foundations are for building on

Hebrews 6:1-3 lists the elementary teachings of Christ: repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment. Then the writer says: "let us … go on to maturity."

Foundations are not camps to live in. They are ground to build from. The church that keeps its new believers in the foundations indefinitely — revisiting the same basics year after year, never moving into the deeper life — produces people who are perpetually dependent, never mature enough to give away what they have received.

But foundations must be real. The house built without them falls when the storm comes (Matthew 7:24-27). The goal is foundations that are genuinely laid — not performed — and then built upon.

Foundation	The core question	Key scriptures
Repentance from dead works	What have I turned from, and why?	Acts 3:19 · Ezek 36:26
Faith in God	Who is God? What has he done?	Heb 11:6 · John 3:16
Instruction about baptisms	What did my baptism mean?	Rom 6:3-4 · Col 2:12
Laying on of hands	How does the Spirit work in me?	Acts 8:17 · 2 Tim 1:6
Resurrection of the dead	What is my ultimate future?	1 Cor 15 · John 11:25
Eternal judgment	Why does how I live now matter?	Heb 9:27 · 2 Cor 5:10

The wilderness is not a detour

Israel's forty years between Egypt and Canaan is not a story of things going wrong. It is the story of formation. A people who had been slaves for four centuries could not simply walk into the Promised Land. Their imaginations had been shaped by slavery. Their instincts ran toward Egypt when things got hard. The wilderness was the necessary space for a slave people to become a covenant people.

Moses understood this at the end of his life. Deuteronomy 8:2 — "Remember that these forty years the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness, so that He might humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart." The wilderness was not a punishment. It was a revelation. And what it revealed — both the faithlessness and the faithfulness — was what God was working with.

New believers go through their own version of this. The old self does not die instantly. Habits built over decades do not vanish in a moment. Relationships that shaped identity do not resolve cleanly. The disciple-maker who tries to protect the new believer from all difficulty is not being kind — they are blocking the very process by which genuine formation happens.

Stay close in the hard seasons. Do not rescue people from what God is doing in them. But do not leave them to face it alone either.

Both mother and father

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12. Paul uses both images deliberately. As a nursing mother: warmth, nourishment, patience, constant presence, the giving of oneself. As a father: encouragement, challenge, urging toward a worthy life.

The mothering side without the fathering side produces people who feel loved but are never challenged to grow. The fathering side without the mothering side produces people who feel pushed but not held. Both are needed, and both can be given regardless of the gender of the disciple-maker.

The question to ask yourself regularly: are the people I am walking with both held and challenged? Is there warmth and truth in the relationship? Is it safe enough to be honest, and honest enough to be safe?

THE FIRST YEAR — A SIMPLE RHYTHM (NOT A PROGRAM)

Months 1-3: Do not leave them alone. Presence before content. Eat together. Pray together. Check in.

Months 1-4: The six foundations (Heb 6:1-2). Not a course — a conversation. Walk through them together.

Months 2-6: Prayer and the Word. Daily habits, learned together, modeled before they are assigned.

Months 4-8: Identity in Christ. Who they now are. Not who they were. Not who others say they are.

Months 6-10: Community. The body is not optional. Help them find their place in it.

Months 8-12: Gifts and calling. Begin to notice what God has put in them. Name it. Encourage it.

Month 12+: Ask them: who can you begin to walk with? Give away what you have received.

WATCH FOR THIS

Leaving a new believer alone in the first three months — the most critical window.

Information without relationship — doctrine without pastoral presence does not form people.

Protecting people from their wilderness — the difficulties are often where God is doing his deepest work.

Keeping people in foundations too long — maturity requires moving forward, not circling the beginning.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Who is a new believer in your life right now? Are they genuinely accompanied, or are they attending services and being left to find their own way?

Think of your own first year in faith. Who stayed close? What did that mean to you? What was missing that you wish had been there?

Where do you lean — mothering or fathering? What does it take for you to offer the other?

What was your wilderness? What did God reveal in you through it that you could not have learned any other way?

PART SIX

Maturing — Abiding and Fruit

"I am the vine and you are the branches.
The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit.
For apart from Me you can do nothing."

John 15:5

Chapter 6: The Vine and the Branches

Everything hangs here

John 15 is the heart of this whole guidebook. Read it before you read anything else in this chapter. Read it slowly. Let it sit.

Jesus uses the word translated abide (the Greek menō; the BSB renders it "remain") eleven times in seventeen verses. He is not using it for decoration. He is pressing on something — returning to it again and again because it is the thing most likely to be missed, the thing that looks optional but is not.

The branch and the vine. The branch does not produce fruit by trying harder. It does not produce fruit by attending more meetings or serving more programs or developing better spiritual disciplines. It produces fruit because it is connected. The sap flows through it. Life moves from the vine into the branch and out through the branch into the world. That is all.

And when the branch is cut off — it does not produce less fruit. It produces no fruit. It withers. It is gathered and burned.

"Apart from Me you can do nothing."

This is the correction to every form of Christian ministry that runs on human energy. It is possible to be extremely busy, extremely productive by external measures, and entirely disconnected from the vine. The programs will run. The numbers may even grow. But there will be no life in it. And eventually the worker will feel it — the emptiness behind all the activity — even if they cannot name it.

> *"Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me."* **— John 15:4**

What abiding is

It is not a feeling. It is not a state of perpetual spiritual warmth. It is a habitual orientation of the whole self toward Christ — maintained through specific, daily acts of returning.

John 15:7 gives the first definition: "If you remain in Me and My words remain in you". The Word is not an add-on to the spiritual life. It is the channel through which the vine's life flows into the branch. The person whose life is not being shaped by the Word is not abiding, whatever else they may be doing.

John 15:9–10 gives the second: "Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love". Not the cause of his love. He loved first (1 John 4:19). But obedience is the channel through which the experience of that love is sustained. Persistent willful disobedience breaks the connection not theologically but experientially. You know this is true because you have felt it.

Psalm 63 gives the texture: "O God, You are my God. Earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You. My body yearns for You in a dry and weary land without water." That is not duty. That is thirst. The person who is abiding is the person who has found that nothing else satisfies — and keeps returning to the only source that does.

Fruit is grown, not produced

Galatians 5:22-23. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Paul does not say: the works of the Spirit. He says fruit. You do not manufacture fruit. You grow it. And you grow it by remaining in the vine, by tending the roots, by staying in the conditions where fruit can form.

The opposite of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is not the absence of virtue. It is the works of the flesh — things that are produced by self-striving, self-assertion, self-protection. The flesh works hard. The Spirit grows fruit quietly, slowly, almost invisibly until it is suddenly ripe.

The practical question for anyone in a discipleship relationship is: what are the roots? Not: what behaviors need to change? Behaviors are fruit. The roots are the prayer life, the Word, the community, the honesty about sin, the regular returning to God. Tend the roots. The fruit will come in season.

David: the mature disciple who fell

Psalm 51 was written by a man after God's own heart who committed adultery and arranged the murder of the husband. The depth of the fall is staggering. And so is the prayer that follows it.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your loving devotion; according to Your great compassion, blot out my transgressions." David does not minimize: "my sin is always before me." He does not deflect: "Against You, You only, have I sinned." He does not offer reform plans: I will try harder from now on. He asks for what only God can give: a clean heart. A right spirit. The restored joy of salvation.

This is what maturity looks like — not the absence of failure, but the speed and honesty of the return. The immature believer stays in shame, performs penance, avoids God because they have broken something. The mature believer runs back. Immediately. With nothing to offer but the wreck of themselves.

> *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."* **— Psalm 51:10**

The disciple-maker's job is to create a relationship in which this kind of honesty is possible. Where the person they are walking with knows they can tell the truth about what has happened — and be met not with judgment but with the same grace that David found.

Maturity is communal

Ephesians 4:11-16 does not describe individual spiritual growth. It describes a body — with different parts, different gifts, different functions — growing together into the fullness of Christ. 'Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ.'

The mature disciple is not a self-sufficient individual who has achieved their own spiritual development. They are a person who is deeply embedded in a community, giving and receiving, known and knowing, using their gifts to build others up while being built up by theirs.

No one matures alone. The person who tries to grow in Christ without genuine community is working against the grain of how God designed the body to function. If someone in your sphere is trying to do this — encourage them back into relationship. Not into programs. Into genuine, honest, costly relationship with other disciples.

WATCH FOR THIS

Activity as a substitute for abiding — busyness in ministry is the most socially acceptable way to avoid God.

Shame instead of return — the person who cannot come honestly before God after failure has lost touch with grace.

Solitary maturity — no one grows to fullness in Christ without the body.

Inspecting fruit instead of tending roots — if a person's behavior is the problem, the roots are where the answer is.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Read John 15:1-17 in full. Sit with verse 5: "apart from Me you can do nothing." What does nothing mean? What in your life would stop if that were actually true?

What are your abiding practices — the specific, regular habits that keep you connected to the vine? Are they working? How do you know?

Which of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) is most underdeveloped in you right now? What does the root of that look like?

Sit with Psalm 51. Write your own version — honest about your specific failures and your specific need. Not for anyone else. For God.

PART SEVEN

Multiplying — Disciples who Disciple Others

"And the things that you have heard me say among many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be qualified to teach others as well."

2 Timothy 2:2

Chapter 7: Giving Away What You Have Received

Four generations in one sentence

2 Timothy 2:2. Paul to Timothy. Timothy to reliable people. Reliable people to others who will teach others. Four generations in a single verse. This is not a program or a vision statement. It is the simple description of how love travels — from person to person to person, through time, across geography, into places and generations the original giver will never see.

Paul writes this from prison. He is near the end. He knows it. And he is not anxious about whether the mission will continue, because he has given it away. He has spent his ministry not building around himself but investing in others who will outlast him. Timothy is the fruit of that investment. Timothy's reliable people are the fruit of Timothy's investment. And the chain will not end with them.

This is the answer to the question every ministry worker eventually faces: what happens when I am gone? The answer is: that depends on whether you have been giving it away.

The Great Commission: because the King has all authority

Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus gathers the eleven on a mountain in Galilee. Some worship. Some doubt. He does not address the doubt. He speaks: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."

That claim is the ground of everything that follows. Not: you should go because people need to hear. Not: you should go because it is the right thing to do. You should go because the King has authority over every nation, every people, every language — and his reign must be announced to all of them. The scope of the commission is as large as the scope of the authority. You cannot confine a total-authority King to a partial geography.

But read to the end of the commission. Baptizing them. Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. The going leads back to forming. The wide work of outreach leads to the patient work of formation. The commission is not complete at the first conversation, or even at the baptism. It is complete when the person being made a disciple begins making disciples of their own.

> *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* **— Matthew 28:19–20**

Barnabas: the investment that traveled forward

Barnabas does not get enough attention in the multiplication story. When the Jerusalem church was afraid of the newly converted Paul, it was Barnabas who vouched for him, brought him to the apostles, explained what had happened (Acts 9:27). He took the social risk. He put his own credibility on the line for someone no one else trusted yet.

Later, after his painful split with Paul over John Mark (Acts 15:39), Barnabas takes Mark with him. Mark had abandoned Paul on the first journey. Paul refuses to give him another chance. Barnabas disagrees — strongly enough to separate from Paul over it.

Mark goes on to write the Gospel of Mark. And Paul, years later, writes from prison to Timothy: "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is useful to me in the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). The man Paul had written off, Barnabas had invested in. And the investment came back as fruit Paul himself needed.

You cannot see where a faithful investment in a person will go. You cannot trace all its fruit. Barnabas could not have known that his decision to stay with Mark would produce a Gospel. You may not know what the person you are walking with will become, or who they will reach, or how far the thread will travel. You are not supposed to know. You are supposed to be faithful.

Reliable, not impressive

2 Timothy 2:2 does not say: entrust these things to gifted people. Or: to influential people. Or: to the most enthusiastic people. It says: "faithful men." Pistoi — faithful, reliable, trustworthy, people who will actually do what they say they will do.

Gifted people who are not faithful will take what you give them and use it for their own ends, or they will run with it for a season and then abandon it when something more exciting comes along. Reliable people may seem slower, less spectacular. But they finish. They are still there three years later. They are still faithful in small things. And it is the small faithful things, done over time, that multiply.

When you are choosing who to invest in — look for faithfulness in the small things that no one sees. How do they keep their word in ordinary life? How do they treat people who cannot give them anything? How do they respond when they are asked to do something unglamorous? That is who they are.

John 17: the prayer behind the commission

John 17. Jesus prays not only for the eleven but for "those who will believe in Me through their message" (17:20). He is already praying for the third generation. The fourth. The thousandth. He sees the whole chain of transmission and prays for every link in it — including you.

The purpose he prays for is not impressive results. It is unity: "that all of them may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." The gathered, loving, united community is itself the witness. The way the body holds together across difference is an announcement that Jesus is real. You cannot manufacture that community. It grows from the vine.

WATCH FOR THIS

Building around yourself — investing in people who depend on you rather than people who will outgrow you.

Choosing impressive over reliable — giftedness without faithfulness does not multiply.

Addition instead of multiplication — discipling everyone yourself rather than equipping others to disciple.

No local roots — giving without developing local people who can carry the work when you are gone.

The Demas drift — 2 Tim 4:10. He was there. He knew Paul. He loved this world more. The drift is slow. Watch for it.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Map your own discipleship generations: who walked with you? Who did they walk with? Who are you walking with now? Who are they beginning to walk with?

Who in your life demonstrates the reliability Paul requires in 2 Tim 2:2? Have you told them what you see in them? Have you begun to invest intentionally?

What would it look like for you to give away everything you have received? Not to keep it, not to teach it — to give it, so that the person can give it in turn?

Read John 17 slowly. Jesus is praying for you in this passage. Let that settle. What do you want to say to him in return?

PART EIGHT

Pitfalls and Warnings

"Be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

1 Peter 5:8

Chapter 8: Where It Goes Wrong

The four soils: Jesus's own diagnosis

Luke 8:4-15. Jesus tells this parable to a large crowd. He explains it only to his disciples. The seed is the word of God. The sower is faithful. What differs is the soil.

The path: the word lands but the devil takes it before it can take root. This is the person who never really hears — who sits in proximity to the word without it ever landing. Not hard-hearted necessarily. Just not open. The response is patient prayer for the ground to be broken up.

The rock: they receive the word with joy. Then testing comes. And they fall away, because there is no root. This is the conversion that looked real and was not quite. The enthusiasm was genuine. The emotion was real. But nothing went deep. The moment the cost arrived, the plant withered.

The thorns: they hear, they begin to grow, and then life crowds out the word. Worries. Wealth. Pleasures. These are not dramatic sins. They are ordinary good things that have become ultimate things. The person is not a bad person. They are a busy person. And the word is slowly suffocated.

The good soil: they hear the word, hold it in an honest and good heart, and by persevering produce a crop. Notice the word persevering. Fruit does not come from a single moment of response. It comes from holding on through all the seasons — the dry ones and the wet ones, the fruitful ones and the fallow ones.

> *"But the seeds on good soil are those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, cling to it, and by persevering produce a crop."* **— Luke 8:15**

Activity without abiding

Matthew 7:22–23. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you.'"

The ministry was real. The works were genuine. But the relationship was not.

This is the hardest warning in scripture for people who care deeply about ministry. It is possible to do real spiritual work while being personally disconnected from the vine. The gifts may operate. The programs may produce visible results. But the fruit of abiding — the love, the joy, the peace, the deepening knowledge of God — is not there. And eventually the worker themselves knows it, even if they cannot say it: something essential is absent.

The answer is not more activity. It is the courage to stop and return to the vine. To the prayer. To the honest examination of what has been driving the work. To the question: am I doing this from love for God and for people — or from something else?

The Galatian error: turning grace into law

Galatians 3:1–5. "O foolish Galatians!" "Are you so foolish? After starting in the Spirit, are you now finishing in the flesh?"

The Galatians had received the gospel: grace, through faith, not by works. Then teachers arrived and began adding requirements. Circumcision. Torah observance. Behavioral compliance. The additions felt serious and devout. They were poison.

Any discipleship pathway can become this. When belonging in the community requires conformity to a set of behaviors before the Spirit has produced those behaviors from the inside — the gospel has been replaced by law. The test of whether your discipleship culture has crossed this line: are the people in it growing increasingly free, or increasingly burdened? Free is the direction. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Demas, and the slow drift

2 Timothy 4:10. "Demas, in his love of this world, has deserted me."

He was there. He is named in Colossians and Philemon as Paul's fellow worker. He knew the apostle. He knew the gospel. He traveled with the mission. And he left — not for theological reasons, not in dramatic apostasy, but because he loved this world more.

The drift is almost never sudden. It begins as a reordering of priorities — career pressing in, comfort becoming important, relationships outside the community demanding more time. None of these are sins in themselves. But when they gradually displace the kingdom, when the person is no longer leaning in, no longer hungry, no longer investing outward — they are drifting. And if the drift is not caught and named, Demas is the end of the story.

This is where genuine community is essential. The person drifting cannot always see it themselves. Someone who knows them well can. The love that names the drift — gently, honestly, without judgment — is one of the most important things a disciple-maker can offer.

The unfinished tower

Luke 14:28–30. Who builds a tower without counting the cost first? Who begins and cannot finish? "Everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This man could not finish what he started to build.'"

The person who leads someone into a shallow conversion without naming what they are entering is building an unfinished tower. The half-converted person takes on the identity of Christianity without the reality of it. They tell their family and friends. They attend for a season. Then the cost arrives — as it always does — and they leave. And the people in their life have now seen Christianity close up and found it unsubstantial.

Name the cost. Before. Trust people with the truth. Jesus did.

Division

1 Corinthians 1:10–13. "I appeal to you, brothers … that there may be no divisions among you." "Is Christ divided?"

Division is perhaps the enemy's most efficient weapon. It does not require theological error. It requires only pride, comparison, unresolved offense, and the decision to be right rather than to be reconciled. Paul's answer to division in Corinth is not a better governance structure. It is the cross: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

When a church divides — when leaders are in conflict, when factions form, when offense goes unaddressed — the watching world receives evidence against the gospel. John 17:21: "that all of them may be one … so that the world may believe that You sent Me." The unity of the community is the witness. Protect it as you would protect your life.

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Which soil type best describes the new believers currently in your sphere? What does that tell you about what kind of attention they need?

Where in your ministry life is there activity that may be substituting for genuine abiding? What would it take to be honest about that?

Is there anyone in your life who is beginning to drift — whose love for God is quietly cooling? What does faithful love look like toward them?

Where is there unresolved offense or division in your community right now? What is your part in it? What does reconciliation require from you?

PART NINE

Calling — Unlocking God's Purpose

"For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance as our way of life."

Ephesians 2:10

Chapter 9: What God Made This Person For

You are his poem

Ephesians 2:10. The word translated workmanship is poiema — the Greek root of our word poem. We are God's poem. His creative work. Not a product, not a resource, not a unit of mission capacity. A poem. Made with intention, with artistry, with specific words in a specific order for a specific effect.

And this poem was written to do specific things — good works prepared in advance. Not generic good works. Works that were thought of before the person existed, that fit this particular person in this particular time in this particular place.

The discipleship work of helping someone discover their calling is not an optional extra. It is part of what formation is for. A disciple who does not know why God made them — who has not yet discovered what they are for — will eventually plateau, or quietly drift toward whatever gives them a sense of purpose, inside the church or outside it.

The witnesses: what the stories teach

Abraham: called before the destination was named

Genesis 12:1–4. "Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you." No coordinates. No timeline. No guarantee of comfort. Just: go, and I will show you.

Abraham is seventy-five. He has no children. He is being asked to leave everything he knows on the basis of a promise he cannot verify. And he goes.

The calling God gives his people is almost always larger than they can see, given when they are not yet equipped, and requires movement before the path is clear. If the whole path were visible, trust would not be required. The calling is given at the level of faith, not at the level of sight. This will feel uncomfortable. It is supposed to.

Moses: forty years of formation for what God had planned

Moses's first attempt to deliver his people was in his own strength — he killed an Egyptian, hid the body, and ran when it came to light (Exodus 2:11-15). Forty years passed. He was tending someone else's sheep in the desert when God spoke from the burning bush.

The man who had been formed in Pharaoh's palace needed to be undone before God could use him. The shepherd years taught him dependence, patience, and the geography of the wilderness he would lead a nation through. Acts 7:22 says he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. But that wisdom had to be broken first.

The disciple who wonders why their calling has been delayed — why the preparation seems too long, why the door is still closed — Moses's forty years is the answer worth sitting with. The formation is the preparation. The waiting is the work.

Esther: placed without knowing why

Esther did not choose to become queen. She did not have a calling vision or a five-year plan. She was an orphaned Jewish girl in a foreign empire who found herself in a place she did not expect, with access she did not seek.

And when the crisis came — when the lives of her people were at stake — Mordecai said: "And who knows if perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

This is the sovereignty beneath all calling. God places his people where they are needed, often before they know why. The believer who wonders why they are in this city, in this workplace, in this family — the answer may not be visible yet. But the placement is not accidental. The question is whether they are awake to the 'such a time as this' dimension of their ordinary life.

Paul: the thorn and the grace

2 Corinthians 12:7-10. A thorn in the flesh. Paul prays three times for its removal. The answer is not healing: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness."

The most fruitful disciple-makers are often those who have most deeply encountered their own weakness — not despite it, but through it. The wound becomes the credential. The limitation becomes the opening through which God's power is visible. Paul's response to this is not resignation. It is almost triumphant: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me."

The person who is trying to disciple others out of their own competence will eventually hit the ceiling of their competence. The person who is ministering out of their weakness — knowing they have nothing unless Christ is working through them — has no ceiling. "Apart from Me you can do nothing." But "streams of living water will flow from within" the one who believes in him (John 7:38).

How to help someone find their calling

You cannot tell someone their calling. Your job is to ask better questions, provide space for honesty, and name what you observe in them — especially what they cannot see in themselves.

Thread	The question to ask	What to listen for
Gifts	What has the Spirit given you?	What gifts are confirmed by others, not just felt by them?
Burden	What breaks your heart?	What injustice or need produces grief or righteous anger?
Fruitfulness	Where does your effort bear natural fruit?	Where do they labor and things happen, almost effortlessly?
Story	What has God been doing in your history?	The pattern of their past points toward what they are made for.

FOR THE LEADER

Never tell someone their calling. Help them find it. Your job is to ask questions, create space, and then confirm what you observe bearing fruit. Called people are not passive — they hunger to discover and live their purpose. If you tell them, it is your vision on them. If they discover it, it becomes their own.

The whole story

Genesis 12 gives the promise: "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you" (12:3). Revelation 5:9 shows its fulfillment: people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation," gathered around the slain Lamb, singing.

Between those two moments, the whole of human history is the story of God going out to find his people. In incarnation. In mission. In discipleship. In the patient, costly, ordinary work of one person walking with another person toward Christ.

Every conversation at a well. Every baptism in a river. Every quiet month of accompanying a new believer through their first year. Every reliable person entrusted with the word so they can entrust it to others. Every specific human being placed in a specific city for a specific time, awake to why they are there.

All of it moves the story forward.

Christ is King. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. His love for people is not exhausted. His glory is the goal. And his invitation to every person who reads this guidebook is not to execute a mission. It is to love him, to stay close to the vine, and to let that love find its way to the people around you.

There can be no fruit apart from him.

So abide. And watch what grows.

> *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will remain—so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you."* **— John 15:16**

PONDER THIS IN SCRIPTURE

Working through the four threads — gifts, burden, fruitfulness, story — what patterns emerge for you? What do they point toward?

What is your thorn? How has God used what you most wished to be removed?

What is the 'such a time as this' dimension of your current placement — your city, your workplace, your family?

Write a short, honest statement of your calling as you understand it today. Not a polished vision statement. Just: what has God made me for, as best as I can tell? Share it with someone who knows you well and ask them what they see.

Appendices

Appendix A: A Discipleship Covenant

This covenant is for use at the beginning of a discipleship relationship. It is not a contract. It is a mutual commitment made before God and between two people who are serious about the journey together.

DISCIPLESHIP COVENANT

I, _____, enter this relationship with the following commitments:

I will be teachable. I will not defend the parts of me that need to change.

I will show up. I will communicate honestly when I cannot.

I will be honest. I will bring what is actually happening — not the presentable version.

I will do the work we agree on between our meetings.

I will pray for the person walking with me.

I commit to the goal of one day walking with someone else the way I am being walked with now.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Walking together with: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: A Simple Meeting Framework

The most effective discipleship meetings are not complicated. They have a consistent rhythm, they are relational, and they always produce a specific next step.

Time	Element	The question	Why it matters
10 min	Check-in	How are you actually doing?	Relationship before content
15 min	Accountability	What did you do with what we talked about last time?	Obedience, not just knowledge
20 min	Scripture	What is God saying to you in this passage?	The Word shapes, not just the leader's insight
10 min	Application	What will you do this week, specifically?	Concrete, not vague
5 min	Prayer	What do you need God to do in you right now?	Dependence, not self-sufficiency

FOR THE LEADER

The accountability question is the one most often skipped. It is also the most important. The person who knows they will be asked 'what did you do with this?' takes the application seriously. Without it, a discipleship meeting becomes a discussion group.

Appendix C: Core Scriptures by Stage

Stage	Scriptures to read together
The two commandments	Deut 6:4-9 · Mark 12:28-34 · 1 John 4:7-21 · Matt 22:34-40
Going out	John 1:1-18 · Isaiah 6 · Luke 10:1-24 · Phil 2:1-11 · Acts 17:16-34
Sowing	John 4:1-42 · Acts 8:26-40 · Col 4:2-6 · 1 Cor 3:1-15 · 1 Pet 3:13-17
Conversion	Acts 2:14-47 · John 3:1-21 · Rom 6:1-14 · Mark 1:14-20 · Luke 14:25-35
Establishing	Heb 5:11-6:3 · Col 2:6-15 · 1 Thess 2:1-12 · Deut 8 · Matt 7:24-27
Maturing	John 15:1-17 · Gal 5:13-26 · Rom 12 · Psalm 51 · Eph 4:11-16
Multiplying	2 Tim 2:1-7 · Matt 28:16-20 · Acts 14:21-28 · John 17 · Rev 5:6-14
Pitfalls	Luke 8:4-15 · Matt 7:15-27 · Gal 3:1-14 · 2 Tim 4:9-18 · 1 Cor 1:10-17
Calling	Eph 2:1-10 · Gen 12:1-9 · Jer 1:4-12 · Esther 4 · 2 Cor 12:1-10

Appendix D: Recommended Reading

These books are worth reading slowly, one chapter at a time, in a discipleship relationship.

- The Master Plan of Evangelism — Robert Coleman. The foundational study of how Jesus discipled the twelve. Read it with your Bible open.
- The Cost of Discipleship — Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The most important modern work on what it actually costs to follow Christ. Do not rush it.
- The Pursuit of God — A.W. Tozer. The texture of genuine abiding. Short. Dense. Life-changing when read slowly.
- Knowing God — J.I. Packer. For anyone who wants to love God with their mind. Rigorous and warm.
- Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands — Paul Tripp. How to walk with people toward change. Practically excellent.
- Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life — Donald Whitney. The abiding practices explained clearly and practically.
- Multiply — Francis Chan. An accessible, honest introduction to making disciples. Good for new disciple-makers.

Appendix E: At a Glance

Stage	Anchor verse	Key practice	Watch for
Love God first	Mark 12:30	Daily return to him	Activity replacing intimacy with God
Going out	John 1:14	Person of peace	Staying comfortable — incarnation always costs
Sowing	Col 4:5-6	Listen before you speak	Scripts instead of persons — each person is unique

Stage	Anchor verse	Key practice	Watch for
Conversion	Acts 2:38	Baptize promptly	Shallow conversion — name the cost beforehand
Establishing	Col 2:6-7	Stay close — first 3 months	The orphaned new believer
Maturing	John 15:5	Tend the roots	Fruit inspection without root cultivation
Multiplying	2 Tim 2:2	Invest in the reliable	Building around yourself — give it away

Christ is King.

Abide in him.

There can be no fruit apart.

John 15:5 · Mark 12:30