



Making Healthy Disciples: Dimensions and Outcomes

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During a recent Assemblies of General Council, I asked an associate pastor from a large church how his discipleship plans were going. He smiled broadly and said, “We have nearly 70% of our adults in small groups!” I rejoiced with him, finished the conversation and walked away...a little perplexed, even sad. In another meeting of church leaders last year, I asked my peers around the table how their discipleship programs were going. All of them expressed frustration, with people’s lives so busy and twice-a-month church attendance counted as “regular.”

How do we “make disciples” well? It is the primary command of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The Great Commandment of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40 tells us what is important to the Lord: people that love God and love their neighbor as themselves. Paul and Peter each offer lists that describe mature believers: the fruit and virtues of a maturing saint (Galatians 5:22-23; II Peter 1:1-10).

For over 25 years I have been asking two questions as a pastor. The first is, “What does a healthy disciple look like?” The second is, “What are the methods and that help disciples make progress?” I have seen successful Sunday Schools, small groups thrive, and mentoring. **The answer is NOT a specific program, but a deep commitment to a vision and a process empowered by the Spirit.**

In the last several years, two breakthroughs in discipleship has been permeating the thinking of many leaders:

- First, the life of Jesus is for the **whole person**, from Sunday morning worship and Monday work, family and friendship, cultural change and missionary passion...Jesus is Lord of all. This leads to understanding the DIMENSIONS of discipleship and the integration of life.
- Second, instead of thinking about programs, we need to frame our efforts in light of biblical and practical **outcomes**. Hebrews 13:7-8 is helpful here: “Consider the outcome of their (your leaders) way of life (relational)...Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever (it is all about Christ in us).”



Five Dimensions of our lives in Christ

Beginning with the Great Commandment, we see three dimensions of our walk with God immediately:

Dimension One: **Spiritual formation** (and the foundation for all the rest): “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.” This includes intimacy with God, transformed motives and actions in light of God’s grace, for “we love him because he first loves us.” (I John 4:10) In this dimension we see the basic spiritual disciplines, enjoying God, church participation and good theology as the foundation.

Dimension Two: **Healthy relationships** (inseparable from One). “Love your neighbor as yourself” According I John 2-4, the proof that we love God is our love for others. Outcomes here include forgiveness, sexual purity, friendships, good boundaries, and much more.

Dimension Three (a little hidden but powerful): **Personal wholeness**. “Love your neighbor...*as yourself*.” In our broken world, emotional and psychological challenges abound. The Lord offers emotional maturity and inner tranquility (Philippians 4). Peter Scazzero’s works on emotionally healthy spirituality and churches are excellent resources. Spiritual gifts can come to anyone in a moment; maturity is a long process (I Corinthians 1-11).

So far, we are in familiar ground. There are two more Dimensions arising from other Scriptures that require our attention.

Dimension 4: **Vocational Clarity**. Maturing disciples are learning about their calling(s) and gifts. God has designed “good works” for believers (Ephesians 2:10) and distributes gifts according to his will (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12-14). Here we help people understand that they are always more than their current jobs, but their work is God’s placement.

Dimension 5 (often overlooked): **Economics and Work**. All of these Dimensions are integrated as God’s people wake up and work each day. Work is all meaningful and moral activity, paid or unpaid. Outcomes here include managing resources, caring for the marginalized, seeking the common good. Imagine our members knowing how to ponder God’s Word and pray as they raise children, study and work!

OK, let’s get practical!

Here are some steps to get started:

- First, are **all the leaders on board with discipleship as a way of life?** Are you ready to have leaders and members open to friendships and at least informal discipling of others?
- Second, look at your mission, vision, and purpose statements. **Can you connect biblical and practical outcomes with the words and images that define you as a church?** For example, using the Assemblies of God Mission Statement, can you place outcomes next to Evangelize, Worship, Disciple and Show Compassion? The aforementioned Dimensions coalesce wonderfully with this or your local church Mission.
- Third, **commit to discipleship outcomes and connect resources with people.** Sermons, Bible studies, classes, small groups, a library/book table, a good website and internal knowledge of the gifts and skills of congregants all help with moving forward. For example, you may have a once-a-year marriage focus. In between, you have available people and resources as needs arise.
- Fourth, be prepared to **evaluate your progress and make adjustments as needed.** One resource that will help is the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment™ - a tool created by AG leaders to give a snapshot of Five Dimensions and 35 Outcomes. (see www.discipleshipdynamics.com) Individuals receive a confidential report. If a leader creates a group, she or he receives a Pastoral Dashboard of the overall group. (This is a great follow-through after the Acts 2 Experience.) There are other ways to get feedback – the key is a culture of continual improvement.

The awakening we are praying for will not be in one location or feature one leader. It will come when millions of church members determine to follow Christ in every area of life, affirming Colossians 3:17-24, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Let’s make healthy disciples!