



JOURNEY

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The Power of 12



The Almighty God gave us a plan to impact the world. It was simple, practical, and accessible to everyone. And it still works today. We may call it *The Power of 12*. This divine stratagem doesn't depend on money, degrees, big crowds, or personal charisma. Actually, the less we trust in on our own abilities and accomplishments, the more likely we are to become instruments through which God's purpose can be fulfilled. Once we embrace it, God's plan leads to our growth, and it spills over to the impact the world around us.

Jesus set the pattern for *The Power of 12* over two thousand years ago. He chose 12 people and mentored them in the faith.

He then died on the cross to provide salvation to His followers and rose from the dead, offering them the

infilling power of the Holy Spirit. Through His Spirit's continual presence, Jesus guided His followers to continue the movement: disciples making disciples who would in turn make more disciples. Thus did the Lord set the pattern and sustain it; what He started long ago He is still doing today.

If we follow His idea, we too can become an unstoppable force, no matter what comes against us. A survey of Christianity on the world scene reveals, in fact, that the Christian faith, when linked with Christ's disciple-making purpose, often spreads most effectively under societal resistant and oppositional regimes. Kings and entire governments may rail against the Church, but it will prevail if *The Power of 12* remains its modus operandi. As though stomping coals underfoot, those who attempt to crush God's work actually spread the embers to light fires for the Gospel everywhere. Persecution purifies, and purified faith becomes a channel for the release of God's love, truth, and power.

The simple plan described in this magazine is the key to establishing a dynamic and growing church worldwide, to deepening God's influence in businesses, to strengthening God's truth in education and student ministries, to solidifying faith in our homes, and to establishing the presence of Christ through growing disciples as salt and light everywhere. And it is so simple that ordinary folks like you and me can be part.

This special edition of *Journey Magazine* presents a few of the core concepts such as: why 12?, key impediments to spiritual growth, a way upward, leading to solid growth, and God with-ness. After reading this issue, we invite you join this multiplication movement by emailing us to request the free digital version of *The Power of 12 Vision Packet*, at support@scriptureawakening.com.



WILLIAM P. CAMPBELL
Author, Founder and President of Scripture Awakening. Host of Beyond Words Radio.



Why 12?

Twelve. It is the number of disciples Jesus chose and so much more. It is the number of tribes in Israel; the number of loaves in the Tabernacle (Leviticus 24:5); the number of gems on the High Priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:15-21); the number of spies sent to explore Canaan (Deuteronomy 1:23); the number of boulders set up to memorialize the crossing of the Jordan River with a monument (Joshua 4:3); the number of stones used for Elijah's altar (1 Kings 18:31); the number of gates in the celestial city (Revelation 21:12); and the number of crops from the Tree of Life (Revelation 22:2). And we're just getting started. The number 12 is found almost 200 times in the Bible.

Why was this number so prominent in Scripture? The ancient Hebrews assigned special meaning to numbers, and linked numbers to the

letters of their alphabet. For them, and in general for the ancient cultures surrounding them, 12 represented something made complete or whole; a perfect and harmonious unit. It represented plentitude, completion, and fullness.

There was also a practical side to the number 12. If one is attempting to influence a maximum number of people through life-to-life processes over time, 12 people is generally recognized as an ideal size for the group. There is a place for smaller and larger gatherings. But trial and error through time has proven 12 to be an optimal number of people to engage together in a focused program such as this, designed to help each member to grow in their faith. Face-to-face gatherings with more than 12 may cause

some participants to be overlooked, left on the sidelines. Conversely, a smaller group than 12 may diminish the potential number of lives being transformed through the teaching or mentoring process.

In this issue, we will highlight a few of the key ideas that can make this happen for you and those who join you on this journey. The full *Power of 12* course will provide you and your group participants 12 key principles over several weeks, requiring just 12 minutes a day and one group meeting each week. The cost for the course is just \$12/month, or whatever you can afford to pay.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus selected 12 people to be His disciples and they eventually impacted the world by following in His steps. How about you? What is preventing you from being part of such a movement today? Perhaps you are being blocked by the unseen barrier, which we will seek to identify next.



The Unseen Barrier

More than two billion people claim to be Christians. But how many are truly mature in their faith, walking like Christ in the world? Statistical analysis shows that number to be incredibly small, a mere fraction of those who claim to follow Jesus.¹ The Bible calls us to draw closer to God every day; yet the average person of faith begins to grow spiritually, then levels off, never reaching their potential. They have difficulty passing through an unseen barrier, illustrated in the diagram below.

not apply them to our lives. Most of us know, for example, that Christ has commanded us to make disciples—followers of the faith who are becoming more like Jesus every day. But are we earnestly engaged in God’s plan for making it happen? Or has our commitment to do what Christ commands become sidetracked by other activities? Many of us have become busy for the Lord, for ourselves, and for others, and yet have missed the joy and fulfillment realized through intentional mentoring relationships.

important, but how many of us have developed a strong and sound prayer life? We may believe that our witness is crucial, but when is the last time you led someone to a saving faith in Jesus Christ? We may be convicted about attitudes and actions that do not fully honor God, but how can we change them?

We cannot fulfill the Great Commandment without following the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). We may read, understand, and even believe the command to love God with all of our heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We will have a difficult time fulfilling this mandate from heaven, however, if we don’t engage intentionally in Christian community through relationships of intimacy, support, and accountability. We need to do what Jesus did in order to obey everything Jesus taught. Once involved in the safe and supportive environment of a properly connected small group, we will find ourselves honing our spiritual gifts and helping others to do the same. We will be on the path toward living like Jesus in a world that desperately needs Him.

The key to breaking through the unseen barrier is first to identify it—it is spiritual mediocrity. We then overcome it, which is what *The Power of 12* is all about as we’ll next consider in the way forward.



¹ George Barna has been tracking beliefs that make up a “Biblical worldview” since 1995 and concludes that only 17 percent of Christians who consider their faith important and attend church regularly actually have a Biblical worldview. For more information, see: *Competing Worldviews Influence Today’s Christians*, Research Releases in Culture & Media, May 9, 2017. <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>

We may call this unseen barrier *mediocrity*. Spiritual sluggishness occurs when we learn Biblical truths but do

not apply them to our lives. There is a vast difference between knowing and living the Christian faith. We may know that prayer is

The Way Upward

I recently became friends with a neighbor who challenged me to pick up my tennis racket and get back into the game. It had been more than 15 years since I had played regularly, and I wondered if it was going to be worth the effort. I came across an online program that offered a coaching process to help people hone their skills, and over several months, my game improved dramatically. The head of this online instruction course explained why it is that 80% of tennis players advance partway from beginner to expert player, and then stall out, level off, and eventually decline in their competence. The average person, he explained, doesn't believe they can improve and move their ratings to higher and higher levels because they are not breaking through the unseen barrier between knowing and doing.

The key to improving one's game, this man claimed, is to focus in on each key aspect of the game, and then to practice it with proper technique over and over until each fundamental skill becomes so ingrained that it can be securely carried into competitive play. The serve, the forehand, backhand, the net game, and other aspects of tennis must be studied and new techniques learned, tried, practiced, and applied. With the right resources, guidelines for self-analysis, and encouragement to stay the course, anyone can break through the unseen barrier.

I quickly saw parallels between the ten-

nis program and the discipleship process Jesus applied with His disciples.

He taught them, showed them how to live what they learned, watched them attempt and fail to do it themselves, and finally encouraged and challenged them until they got it right in their daily experiences.

This process is easy to comprehend. In fact, it is basic—so basic that we have overlooked it. We have attempted to become spiritual pros overnight, while ignoring the fundamentals of the faith, resulting in stunted growth and the belief that we are forever doomed to spiritual mediocrity. We strive for instant successes in the spiritual realm by attending weekend seminars, reading key books, and listen to exciting messages. And the pathway to spiritual maturity remains untrod as competing interests draw us away from Christ's command.

We have become like the tennis novice who watches a world-class competition and then steps onto the tennis court and expects to play like a pro. Such an unrealistic approach to improvement results in discouragement and eventual acquiescence to the realm of mediocrity. And the

Lord is not pleased. We have sidestepped His guidelines, and we are the ones who suffer most for it. The abundant life God has promised us has become a distant hope, a vision unfulfilled.

Deep down, we long for better. Scripture Awakening offers the needed guidelines to make such improvements in the essential areas of our faith journey. And its resources are designed to connect us with others in an intentional discipleship process. That process will change our lives and impact countless others in our spheres of influence. All of the Scripture Awakening materials are designed around a simple and time-tested flow to help us become Christlike under the profound guidance of Scripture. We will be led on a journey that helps you to *read*, *study*, and *live* the Bible. Go to ScriptureAwakening.com to learn more about our Scripture resources.

You and I are designed by God to excel for Him throughout our days until we cross the finish line. Every failure is meant to be an opportunity for growth and every weakness a channel for God's grace. As we engage in *The Power of 12*, we will begin to realize that there are new adventures awaiting us in the spiritual realm, higher summits of faith to climb, more lives to be impacted, and ultimately greater glory to be given to our Wondrous God.

Solid Growth

When I first moved my family to Western North Carolina, I was thrilled to have found a home on a large wooded lot. Tired of mowing, edging, fertilizing, aerating, watering, and mowing since my youth, I was ready for a change. I settled into our new home and smiled as I eyed the new home's two narrow strips of grass, swallowed up by forest and gardens. It seemed that my yard work would finally become more manageable.

After I had experienced a few years of seasonal maintenance, however, I came to view the forest around me as a sky-high lawn and the trees and shrubs closest to the house as a never-ending edging project. Fertilizing, trimming, chipping, removing, and replacing trees and raking fall foliage so filled my time that I began to long for the days I could simply jump on a riding mower and finish weekly chores in a few hours. Eighteen years later, a friend who was nationally recognized for her horticultural expertise, eyed our yard and declared it one of the most difficult yards to maintain in our area. She urged us to sell it and to simplify our lives.

Don't get me wrong: I love trees—and all the more now that I live on a smaller lot and can take time to enjoy their

great variety, seasonal transitions, and intractable growth. I have come to appreciate more deeply the Bible's numerous references to nature's wooden behemoths as illustrations of our personal spiritual growth potential. Unlike blades of grass, trees require significant time to reach full maturity. A blade of Kentucky bluegrass can achieve its potential in weeks; it takes years to mature an oak, birch, or poplar.

Relative to eternity, our lives are short, and we dry up, wither, and die off like the grass and flowers of a field (Psalm 103:15).

When we set the course of our spiritual growth against the length of our short lives, however, the Bible likens each of us to trees. Steady and solid growth requires time and the right conditions.

We are to be like trees, “planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3). The water is God's Word. We cannot expect to grow and be fruitful for God if we are not constantly soaking in the truths of Scripture. And even in the

best conditions, solid growth into maturity requires time—lots of it.

The Power of 12 provides you guidelines to grow—not like a weed, but like an oak. Think years, not weeks. And commit to growing together with others; not alone. By drawing from the water of God's Word with a small group of committed people, you will together be able to spur each other on toward real maturity. As you grow together, you will experience natural seasonal variations and will weather the storms of life that are necessary for you to achieve your full potential.

Do you wish to grow in your faith, to be part of a kingdom force that is changing the world for good? If so, this program is for you. It provides you needed resources, all based on Scripture, to strengthen dozens of key areas of your faith walk with God. It also offers guidelines for self-analysis, that you might establish markers in your spiritual growth. It will guide you to engage in community, helping to ensure the spiritual success you long for. It will also enable you to help others find victory in their walk with the Lord. Plan to engage in this intentional, Biblically guided discipleship series that you might be part of God's plan to impact the world with the power of God's Word.



God's With-ness

My youngest daughter, Mia, developed a love for music and soon became attached to the flute. During her college years, she played in an orchestra, and my wife and I regularly attended her concerts to cheer her on. We soon came to expect the initial signal that the concert was about to begin: the sudden and brief interval when the instrumentalists began warming up, filling the concert hall with a cacophony of discordant and irritating sounds. During those few minutes of preparation, the wondrous potential of each instrument became lost in the jarring sounds from the violins, trumpets, tubas, clarinets, and drums all clashing against each other.

Everything changed, however, once the conductor walked onto the platform. As the conductor's arms rose, the instruments fell silent. Smooth and decisive movements of the conductor's wand brought the strings, woodwinds, and percussions to life and led them together in a harmonious flow.

The Lord is our Conductor. He came to earth to breath His life into and through each believer that together we might become a symphony, proclaiming His glory by harmonizing

with each other under His direction. He initially chose 12 disciples to be "with" Him (Mark 3:14). He knew they could not grow spiritually if He merely imparted truths. He helped them live what they learned. He prayed for them regularly (Luke 22:32; John 17). He knew their areas of strength and weakness and encouraged them in their faith (Matthew 16:8-11; 18). He recognized opportunities for growth in every trial and through every obstacle (John 21:17; 1 Corinthians 10:13). He never abandoned them, even when they quit on Him (Mark 14:50; Hebrews 13:5).

So it is today when we meet in small groups to help each other grow in faith—Christ shows up. As we enjoy His presence, He leads us into a melodious flow of life and witness that cannot be accomplished by mere human programming. As we follow His lead, He works in and through each one in the group, building fellowship, and spawning outreach to the world. If we ignore Him, however, we can easily become lost in our individual agendas and our perspectives clash with that of others. We go nowhere fast.

The Power of 12 is built on the realization that when Christ is truly with us, we will be motivated to truly be with each other. Such life-to-life sharing in the presence of God opens the channel for God to work in our lives most profoundly. No longer is discipleship just a program, a goal to accomplish, or a godly ideal. It is the transformational process that only God can bring about. But we must do our part.

The *with-ness* Jesus provided for the first 12 disciples has continued through the ages and is available still today through His Holy Spirit (John 14:15-21, 25-26). Small groups committed to with-ness can become transformational incubators for growth, cells for leadership development, and beachheads for kingdom advancement in a family, an educational setting, a church, a business, and an entire community. And they become part of a movement that touches the world, not by mere addition, but by multiplication.

A Multiplication Movement

Have you ever been to the Dead Sea? It is just as it sounds: dead. There are no fish or plants in the water, nor birds swooping from overhead in search of food. Its cobalt-blue waters are not supportive of life as we typically think of it, despite the fact that freshwater springs feed the Dead Sea along its floor. The Dead Sea lacks life because its waters have no place to flow, no output.

If a small group of believers has no output, no life-giving means for showing the love of Christ to others or for sharing His truth, the group may stagnate spiritually. When groups become committed to growing and to launching new groups, however, Christ's life becomes evident within and through them once again.

Our natural tendency is to remain close to people we know and trust and closed to those we do not yet know. It takes the driving force of a Biblical vision for us to move outside of our comfort zones and to impact others. There is no vision more compelling than the realization that every human being is an eternal soul bound for either heaven for hell. And the dynamic witness to Christ's life is best shared with the world when we reach out to others together. A small group can make a huge difference for eternity

when it is committed at the outset to the Biblical model of multiplication.

It is by helping another along the journey of spiritual growth that we posture ourselves to grow as well. The one who teaches learns as much or more than the one who is taught.

A one-to-one mentoring process, woven into the small group experience, ensures that real-life coaching is occurring for everyone involved.

Before the Lord ascended to heaven, He told His followers to do as He did—to reach out and incorporate more and more people into the community of faith. They were to make disciples of the nations (Matthew 18:28-30). They met at first in the Temple and may have become a holy huddle had the Lord not used persecution to spread their faith far and wide. Like seed cast by the Master Sower, small groups of believers soon began meeting in homes throughout Asia Minor; they would eventually permeate the known world. The Roman Empire, determined to stomp out faith in Christ,

was ultimately turned upside-down by it (Acts 17:6).

Some 300 years after the birth of Christ, Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the state religion. Attempting to make the Christian faith more palatable, he blended Christian belief with pagan holidays. Believers began worshipping freely in large buildings and life on easy street led them into a dead-end. They lost their passion for spreading the faith and the movement of multiplication became a monument to mediocrity.

Not much has changed in our day, and we have a choice to make. We can prioritize bigger budgets, more beautiful buildings, and more expansive programs, or we can make our relationships with the Lord, with each other, and with those who need the Lord paramount. *The Power of 12* is designed to help us engage in the latter, that we might influence the world through a movement of multiplication. It all begins by reading the free *Power of 12 Vision Packet*, which will provide suggested next steps. In it, you will learn how in just 12 minutes a day, along with a group meeting each week, you and a dozen or so of your family, friends, and acquaintances can begin a journey designed to change your lives and to impact the world.



Wise Words from a Teacher

Tragedies. Celebrations. Times of unknowing and times the path is well known. That's life. We often say, "It's been a day," or "Today's been a good (or bad) day" to describe how our day has gone. How do we know God is providing no matter what our day brings? Looking back over my life, I have encountered a variety of days and I have rejoiced, giving thanks to God for the good and cried out to God with pain no one should bear. Yet amid all the circumstances, there is one thing I have found to be true: God provides.

Years ago, a wise teacher told our class that if we wanted to see God at work, we needed to tuck Scripture in our hearts so that when the tough times came (like when Hagar, Sarah's slave, thought her son would die, Gen 21:9-19), we could stand on God's word. She also said, tuck Scripture in your heart so that when the good times came, we could rejoice like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (who were not burned in the fiery furnace, Daniel 3:8-30) at what God did. I asked God to give me some Scriptures to carry with me.

One of the first was, "I know the plans I have for you...plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Imagine then, when I was struggling with decisions and "bad" days came, how that Scripture reminded me that God would provide what was best for my spiritual journey.

On days when I felt so alone, thinking no one cared whether I lived or died, the Word I had tucked away reminded me, "...I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you..." . I knew I was not alone.

God provided more by reminding me of that even when I doubt, He is with me always (Matthew 28:20)." It also was not long before I received a phone call from someone who said God had

put on their heart to call me. God provided just what I needed.

Perhaps however, one of the greatest verses I tucked in my heart was Ephesians 2:8-10 which says, "For by grace you have been saved by faith... you are God's workmanship..." God not only chose to create me but wants a relationship that gives Him permission to guide me on the path He has chosen for me. To know that wherever I am or whatever I am doing, when I turn to God, He will provide what I need in that moment to bring about the best for my life, is a promise I can never forget.

The journey of life is strengthened and made whole giving God the keys to our hearts and minds...because in God's most all-encompassing provision, He has provided the keys to His eternal kingdom.



JANET JOHNSON

Pastor, spiritual mentor, author, and speaker, helping others experience God's love and wholeness.



Parenting is Discipleship

Parenting is hard! There are times you feel exhausted and unsure if you are doing the right thing.

When we realize, however, that we are making disciples of our children, we understand that parenting is a required thing. In our Bibles we can find provisions from the Lord that will encourage us to continue cleaning up the messes and facing the challenges as we mentor our children.

In my experience as a parent, I have found six qualities of my life that often need replenishing. These are *wisdom, patience, perseverance, grace, peace, and rest*. Without the fullness of these qualities, I cannot be the parent God wants me to be.

Wisdom

Everyday I question myself. Do I have the wisdom to raise these two pre-teens to be competent adults? The answer is yes, but sometimes you wonder. In Proverbs 2:6, we read these words: “For the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” Since parenting is a high calling from God, He assures us that if we lean on Him, He will give us the wisdom to be effective and loving parents.

Patience

You may have heard your parent say, “My patience is running thin.” I must admit that I have said this myself. Pa-

tience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay without getting upset or angry. When I try to get both children out the door to their respective activities, my patience is mostly gone. It seems the older they get, the slower they go. When I feel my patience getting low, I remind myself of the patience God has for me. He never gives up on me.

Perseverance

The definition of perseverance is “being persistent in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success.” Parents often feel wiped out due to the difficulties of raising children. God tells us in 2 Thessalonians 3:13 that as brothers and sisters in Christ we should not tire of doing what’s right. Galatians 6:9 says, “Let us not become weary in doing good for at a proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Raising children requires perseverance...but God promises a harvest. That harvest is children who know and love the Lord.

Grace

Dear parent, know that the Lord promises to extend grace to those who love Him. Ephesians 4:7 says each one of us will have grace given as Christ apportioned it. When you feel like everything is falling apart, God will provide His grace.

Peace

Parents will be the first to tell you that having children will most likely bring

chaos into your life. Just the opposite of peace! You go from the crying baby to the energetic toddler to the always questioning five-year old to the rebellious teen. But God wants us to find that peace amongst the chaos as only He can provide. Remember, “God is not a god of disorder but peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33) and Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

Rest

In the busy days of our lives, we can forget to rest. Parents are notorious for giving everything they have to their families. God did not want us to be the parent that stays in a state of exhaustion. It is okay to say, “I need a break.” God gives strength to the weary and increases the powers of the weak (Isaiah 40:29).

I encourage all parents to remember that God has trusted you to raise children who love Him. Your call to disciple your children a sacred task that He will always support you in and provide for your every need.



ASHLEY HOOKER

Freelance writer, stay-at-home mom, and supportive wife of her pastor husband in West Virginia.



Who to Disciple

When Jesus' command to make disciples really came alive for me, I was all in. In my younger years, I rolled up my sleeves, prayed, and went to work. At the time my spouse and I were leading group Bible studies for whoever would come. So in my mind, anyone in our study group was a candidate for discipleship. And so we poured ourselves into those believers. However, we sadly discovered much of our 'discipling' was like throwing seed on hard ground. Discouraged, I wondered what was wrong. Was it us? Them? What?

So I pondered, prayed, and sought God. He saw my intention...and truly it burned in my heart. Over time, God directed me to several discipling books that were very helpful and practical.

One day a very simple acronym came across my radar: FAT. While I don't recall its origin, it proved incredibly useful about who I should disciple.

FAT stands for: *Faithful, Available, and Teachable*. As you look deeper into Jesus' methods, learn from the Master Discippler. While hundreds followed Him, Jesus, as a man, had to observe,

discover, and discern who, out of those followers, deserved His focused time, attention, and training. By the way, I added the letter, "S" to the acronym, and you will see why as you read on. So let's briefly look to see what it means to be a FAST believer.

FAITHFUL. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, we have this instruction: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The first person (John) I truly disciplined proved this quality of faithfulness over and over again. He was young, AND he demonstrated faithfulness. He wanted to be a faithful man. Look for it. Solomon wrote: "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, But who can find a faithful man?" (Proverbs 20:6). Needless to say, this requires your time, attention, and even inconvenience in order to observe it. Faithfulness begets faithfulness. Oh, but when you find it—rejoice!

AVAILABLE. Simply said, does this person show up? For almost a year, John met with me frequently on early (and sometimes bitterly cold) mornings. Oh yes, there was an occasional no show. But 99% of the time, John made the effort to be with me. Again, this stemmed from being faithful. He wanted to be with me. He wanted to grow.

I saw spiritual hunger. Remember, Jesus discriminated between words and actions. We must do likewise. Spoken good intentions can never replace the actions of one who shows up.

SERVANT. "But I am among you as the One Who serves" (Luke 22:27). Jesus said "even the Son of man...came to serve" (Mark 10:45). Be assured, this attribute must be present in anyone you are led to disciple. Jesus invited His disciples to greatness...and then issued this simple, clear path to greatness: "Be the servant of all." As you spend time with your mentee, listen and observe carefully his or her words and attitudes. Do they look to the needs of others first? Are they attentive, helpful, willing to do menial tasks? Look for that pattern and practice in them. When you see it, encourage it!

TEACHABLE. After decades of mentoring experience, I've found that teachability is always accompanied by humility. A person eager to learn is usually not full of his/her-self. Does this potential disciple display a hunger to learn? If not, then they fall into the category of the "many" Jesus referred to, as in "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Just don't make the mistake of choosing them. And remember this: Jesus made it clear that we should be "teaching them to obey." Does this believer put into practice what they've learned from you? If so, be sure to commend them for it.

So there you have it: pray and look for **FAST** believers! I hope that this brief discipleship primer is as useful to you as it has been (and still is) to me. Relational discipleship is both the hardest, and most rewarding Kingdom work I've ever known. May God give you favor and good success as you seek Him to discover believers that you may invest in.



MARK LUCAS
Communications Consultant for
Scripture Awakening.

“**BNEXT** is a great discipleship tool... and a renewing experience.”

— John Peterson, Pastor

STUDY
BNEXT





A Crisis of Discipleship

There is a crisis of discipleship in the American Church today.

Reams of research confirm the simple observation that in many ways the lives of most professing Christians are not much different from their non-believing neighbors. Like ancient Israel and the Church in various periods, we have absorbed the beliefs, values, and behaviors of the surrounding culture to an alarming degree. To be sure, there are exceptions among individuals and congregations, but they only serve to confirm the reality.

This sad situation dishonors God, brings reproach on the name of Jesus Christ, undermines the credibility of the Church, strengthens atheist rhetoric, and brings frequent (often justified) charges of hypocrisy against God's people and His work. It stands in stark contrast to the teachings of Jesus about discipleship and the witness of the Church in other eras and presents us with an urgent and unavoidable challenge.

A significant part of our problem today is widespread misunderstanding about the nature of discipleship. Grasping what Jesus taught about discipleship can give us helpful perspective and enable us to see more clearly what we need to do.

Jesus didn't load his followers with impossible, soul-crushing demands as the

Pharisees did. He knew how weak fallen human beings were. His invitation was grace-filled, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and will give you rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). He invites all who are weary of burdensome, legalistic religion to cast it off, take up the yoke of discipleship to Him and learn from Him.

Paradoxically, His discipleship, while demanding, is easy, and His burden is light. That is because Jesus empowers His disciples to obey His commands. And because He extends forgiveness when they fail.

We need only consider how weak, sinful, and often clueless the twelve were during their three years with Him and how patient, kind, and forgiving He was toward them. His persistent grace brought transformation to their lives, and it will do the same for us as we follow Him.

How do we become disciples of Jesus today? It begins when we respond to

His call to "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15) and are baptized into the fellowship of the Church—a community of other disciples. This put us on the narrow road to eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14). Discipleship continues as we learn to obey all that Jesus taught His original disciples—through His teaching and example—until our life's end. This includes helping others become disciples of Jesus.

The narrow road is a hard road on which we will suffer temptations, trials, and persecutions, just as Jesus did. That is why He said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26). It is also why He said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Those who have walked the narrow road ahead of us say that the joy of fellowship with Jesus far exceeds any hardship we may encounter.



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Senior pastor, First Baptist Church,
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Willie McLaurin

Vice president, Great Commission Relations
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