

## **Relational Discipleship**

**Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Jesus' approach with His disciples**

Every church says they're about making disciples. Most have the best of intentions. The issue in the American church is this: Why do so few Christ followers emulate and embody the character of their Lord? Few churches today actually define discipleship; fewer still lay out a systematic plan for getting their people there. As Matthew 4:19 reveals, a disciple is one who is following Jesus, being transformed by Jesus, and one who is devoted to the mission of Jesus (For more, read Jim Putman's book Real Life Discipleship). Why is the plethora of Bible studies, small groups, conferences, trainings and programs not producing more fully formed followers of Jesus? In many cases, it's because churches are using all the wrong benchmarks for measuring growth.

Discipleship is far more than faithful attendance, membership, tithing or a leadership position in a local church body. Discipleship is about a person being transformed from the inside out and growing in the grace of God in Christ (Eph. 4:13-16, 2 Pet. 3:18). We believe the best benchmarks relate to godly character traits that flow from the life of a disciple. But how can we measure such things in the absence of true biblical community hardwired around authentic relationships and mutual accountability? We can't. That's why at Restoration Church our desire is to follow in the pattern of Jesus in encouraging life on life discipleship.

## **Gracious Character (heart over behavior)**

**1 Samuel 16:7, 2 Corinthians 5:12, Psalm 145:8-9, Mark 12:29-31 (The Great Commandment)**

The American church has managed to make God's grace the end and not the means to be set apart unto Him. Turn on the radio, flip on the TV, and you'll hear it: we've made grace a commodity to be consumed and not a character to be displayed. We are called to reflect God's grace (the character of God). But here's the thing about grace: If we're created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), though we're now marred by sin and the fall, to the extent that we are not gracious, it is a cosmic offense to the God who IS!

Grace is simply God's unmerited favor, and God's grace is amazing (Ephesians 2:1-10), but it's also the very thing that makes Him set apart, holy and so NOT like us! So our response to His grace should be worship – not consumerism! The extent to which we do not worship Him, obey Him and make him Lord of our lives reveals how much we've made an idol of a pseudo grace that gives us free license to pursue our own selfish desires. Perhaps the best trick of Satan today is to dupe us into making an idol of this "grace" that we get to define while completely taking God's glory out of the picture. What's the point? At Restoration Church, we believe that Christ-followers are most set apart for God/most holy, when we respond by reflecting His grace to others. When the battle is at our front door, when we're under attack, in the fire and especially in the face of an enemy, do we emulate the gracious character of our Lord?

## **Spiritual Faith (Spirit-initiated authentic faith)**

**Hebrews 11:1, 11:6, 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:7, 1 Peter 1:6-7, John 14:12, 1 John 5:4,**

**\*1 Corinthians 2:5, 16:13**

Spirit-initiated faith is integral to the follower of Jesus. We live in a culture in which the majority of Christians make decisions just like the lost world around them. We line out our options, weigh pros and cons and discern which outcome is potentially most favorable. The difference? The Christian can cherry-pick a Bible verse or passage to justify and validate the decision. Often the thought processes and conclusions are divorced from relational connection to God. As Henry Blackaby (Experiencing God) states, we affirm that God is at work all around us, He is pursuing a love relationship with us that is real and personal, He invites us to join in Him in His work and He speaks by the Holy Spirit through His Word, through prayer, through circumstances and through His people. God's invitation leads to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action; joining God requires adjustments and obedience. At Restoration Church, we believe that the Christ follower lives by faith. Out of the overflow of a love relationship with God, we daily hear His voice and respond to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Decision-making flows from relationship, from a biblical worldview, an eternal kingdom mindset and an unabashed commitment to be a God-pleaser (Gal. 1:10), doing everything as unto Christ (Col. 3:23-24).

## **Communal Giving**

**Acts 2, Mark 12:41-44, 2 Cor. 8:1-9, 14-15, 24; 2 Cor. 9:6-13, Proverbs 3:9, 27-28**

The book of Acts reveals a biblical community of sacrificial givers. Today's church is a far cry from this as many are content to give from their overflow but rarely from their deficit or a place of personal cost. What is in view? Christian communism? Even Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-11 that anyone not willing to work shouldn't eat. He reprimands those who are idle and not working. The goal is not Christian communism rather a body of Christ that reflects the sacrificial giving of their Savior. Jesus once told his disciples that the poor would always be with us (Mark 14:7). At Restoration Church, we do not hold up social justice, rather we hold up the gospel. We hold up Jesus, who though He existed as God, emptied Himself and humbly took the form of a servant, pouring out His life for others (Phil. 2:5-8).

Until the consummation of our hope and the return of Jesus, the world in which we live will continue to consist of haves and have-nots. In the meantime, there is no "law of giving" that we hold over the believer. The tithe is the jumping off point/ the starting block from the law; but grace abounds, always exceeding the law. At Restoration Church, we believe that the follower of Christ should fight and flee from idols of culture, intentionally building margin into their lives – time margin, resource margin and financial margin that enables them to sacrificially give, starting with the immediate needs of their local church body and community.

## **Expectant Worship (engaged response)**

**Romans 12:1, Hebrews 12:28, Mark 11:24, James 1:6, John 4:24, Psalm 105:4, 1 Chronicles 16:10-12, Ezra 3:10-11**

Worship is response. In the New Testament, the word most often translated “worship” (proskuneo) simply means “to fall down before” or “bow down before.” Worship is about the posture of our hearts and minds. Worship is a state/ an attitude of spirit. Worship is initiated by the Spirit of God and fueled by the truth of His Word (John 4:23-24). Ultimately, the object of our worship is the person and work of Jesus, the Word become flesh, the manifestation of God’s glory, grace with skin on. Today most worshippers in the American church are victims of their own expectations. Whether it pertains to a corporate worship setting or the quiet stillness of a morning devotional, the question is this: What are we believing God for? Do we expect Him to show up, to speak and to reveal Himself? Scripture is chock-full of “God-encounters”; it points to a God who reveals Himself to men. At Restoration Church, our desire is to build a culture of expectation when it comes to seeking and responding to God. We believe that God is not playing hide and seek with His people. We believe that those who draw near to God experience the blessing of a God who longs to draw near to them (James 4:8).

## **Cultural Impact (city, state, country, world)**

**The New Testament...**

Few churches measure the success of their church by the standard of cultural impact. They’ll point to attendance, numbers, budgets and buildings, but rarely can they identify specifically where their ministry IN the community has produced cultural change, renewal and spiritual impact. At Restoration Church, our desire is to hear from God as we target areas of need and respond in obedience as we GO OUT into our world (starting in Bryan) to engage people with the gospel. Our goal is not to attempt to tackle every felt need, every opportunity for ministry, etc. Rather, our goal (as we are on mission with God) is to narrow the focus and do a few things really well in regard to effecting cultural change. Whether it’s serving teachers, ministering to hungry families, offering counseling ministries or teaching classes on budgeting and finance, we want to do “God” things, not just good things.

We believe that by God’s design, a local church body should have a reputation for loving, serving and pouring itself out for its community and beyond. This reputation is not for the sake of building up the name of Restoration Church; rather it is for the purpose of lifting up the name of Jesus. Our desire is not to divorce service from the gospel. Instead, as we serve and give, we will continually point back to a Savior who demonstrated His love by giving His life for us.