



**SMALL-BATCH
DISCIPLEMAKING**

**A RHYTHM FOR TRAINING THE FEW
TO REACH THE MANY**

DAVID SUNDE

In a world full of contended ideas and untested ones, David Sunde has practiced the rhythms he has thoughtfully articulated in *Small-Batch Disciplemaking*. Not only have I watched him practice it around me, but I am also a product of it personally. The investments of time and intention have affected my life significantly. It has changed the way I look at my personal life, professional life, married life, and parenting. Each rhythm invites God into those areas of your life in renewed ways. Discipleship was intended to influence every part of our lives, not just our Sunday mornings. *Small-Batch Disciplemaking* gives you the chance to be discipled in a way that affects every part of your life.

IRINI FAMBRO, PhD, MDiv, owner of Intelligent Leadership

We crave change! Not just theoretical change but real, practical, life-altering change. There is no more powerful way to awaken change within the church, within our souls, and within our neighborhoods than the work of apprenticeship. Dave Sunde has written a beautifully eloquent but practical primer on how to apprentice ordinary Christians to become change agents in the world. *Small-Batch Disciplemaking* is bathed in the genuine relational and spiritual mechanics of how to pass on the life of Christ to another. Get this resource in your hands and in your heart—it can create ripple effects that will change everything!

DAN WHITE JR., author of *Love Over Fear*, coauthor of *The Church as Movement*

In this book, Dave Sunde puts his finger on what makes faith work (and what is missing in so many churches and ministries). Far too often, we've made Christianity a cognitive experience but not a life experience. We don't go deep because we don't practice. We believe but we don't apprentice. Be warned: If you heed the big ideas in this book, you will be transformed. I highly recommend it.

DR. TIM ELMORE, CEO and founder of Growing Leaders,
author of *A New Kind of Diversity*, coauthor of *Generation Z Unfiltered*

Want to grow in your faith? Want to help others do the same but don't know where to start? Then *Small-Batch Disciplemaking* is just what you need! I've known David Sunde for over twenty-five years, and I'm thrilled he is finally sharing his insights and experiences with the world! This field guide will be a resource you look to again and again as you journey with Jesus and help others do the same.

KURT JOHNSTON, pastor of NextGen Ministries at Saddleback Church

Sunde's book is a breath of fresh air. It walks alongside us, showing us a better way. The Western church is obsessed with numbers and programs, but Dave helps us see the importance of really doing life together. I mean, really. No performance. No lights. No show. Just simply what it looks like to follow Jesus together. Dave is the right person to write this book as it is the life he leads, the way he is. I highly recommend this book and the helpful brilliance in its pages.

TYRONE WELLS, recording artist with over 60 million Spotify streams and a #1 singer-songwriter album on iTunes

Small-Batch Disciplemaking calls us to reground ourselves in the ancient tenets of our faith, not in the sense of abstract theology but in core practices of transformational living. This writing is infused with the wisdom hard-won from his years of experience as a follower of Jesus and as a guide to many seeking to do the same. This book is a much-needed practical guide and theology of the church reimagined around the core practices of our faith. If you hunger for more in your spiritual life, this is a must-read.

HARV POWERS, PhD, president and founder of The Redimere Group, speaker, coach, consultant, author of *Redemptive Leadership*

Small-Batch Disciplemaking is a fresh and much-needed contribution to the practice of discipleship. This is a field manual that comes from David's effective ministry of discipling others. I've known David for many years. Discipleship is his passion, and this book is his legacy. After fifty plus years of leading churches, my assessment is that life-changing discipleship is the church's greatest weakness. We need this book!

REV. SAM WILLIAMS, pastor, catalyst, coauthor of *To Transform a City*

Small-Batch Disciplemaking serves the church a large portion of wisdom that lays down a compelling baseline for a healthier twenty-first-century church. Dave Sunde identifies seven transferable rhythms that empower every Christian to fulfill their God-given responsibility: Make disciples!

ERIK PETRIK, chief creative officer of CT Media Group and Christianity Today, executive producer of *The Rise & Fall of Mars Hill*



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with Tyndale House Publishers*



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TO REACH THE MANY**

DAVID SUNDE

Small-Batch Disciplemaking: A Rhythm for Training the Few to Reach the Many

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FOREWORD

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME, years ago, when I heard David Sunde say, “Maybe *practice* is the new *deep*.” Like an earworm that adhered itself to my brain cells, the idea wouldn’t leave me. It kept rolling around in my mind, continuously occupying my thoughts, and I knew that the truth embedded in those words was worthy of my attention.

Those words countered the constant call of church members saying “I want to go deep!” . . . when there was little evidence of transformation coming from what they already knew. (I include myself in that chorus.)

How dangerous that we can so easily mistake information for transformation.

There is a comfort in the accumulation of knowledge, sound bites, and pieces of information I can use to convince myself that I live in the world of “deep.” It builds a fortress around my soul, protecting the most vulnerable places from the hard work of change. It allows me to avoid facing the difficult things necessary for transformation to happen and puts

me in just enough of a perceived superior position that I start to believe my own delusion.

I'd prefer to read another verse, even another chapter, than to have to sit for more than a minute in my pain, much less sit and ask the hard *Why?* questions. Give me another book to read or webinar to attend, but please don't ask me to practice moving toward someone I really don't like or to inconvenience myself for someone else or to admit that I have so many sins and give them names.

This book reminds us that there is a way, the way of Jesus . . . and it is not easy, but it is good. It does not exist in the clean lines of information but in the messy places of being and of making disciples throughout our lives. And so we practice. We think it over, write it down, and talk it through. We allow the words and ways of Jesus to capture our hearts, souls, and minds. We wrestle, we object, we submit, we question. We do it alone and in community. We practice our way toward living as disciples.

Dallas Willard often said that the way we spend our time reflects what we most deeply believe. What you are about to read will challenge and encourage you to spend your time on what really matters in ways that will allow you to grow old well with God. David has always had a way of using fresh language—words that take you by surprise, causing you to look at something you were so sure of from a new perspective. He brings a point of view that causes you to shift your thinking in ways that bring the truth into sharper focus. And how we need that.

Drawing on profound spiritual analogies, this book is a

winsome portal into the life of becoming the people we long to be. *Small-Batch Disciplemaking* offers a way to integrate faith and practice to know and see God more clearly, pulling us back to the way of Jesus that is personal, tailored, and developmental. Rhythms of planting, cultivating, waiting, and reaping remind us of the time factor, which I am so hopelessly impatient with. Jesus often used the phrases *you have heard it said . . . but I tell you . . .* to guide us into the unlearning that is necessary to follow God well. That's the needed approach that fills this book. So turn the page with expectation. I did, and I was not disappointed.

Nancy Ortberg

CEO of Transforming the Bay
with Christ

INTRODUCTION

Disciples Aren't Mass-Produced

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT about the difference between an inheritance and a legacy? The words are often used interchangeably. Both suggest something of value is left behind after a person's life on earth is over. But there's one notable distinction.

An inheritance is something we leave for someone.

A legacy is what we leave in them.

There are things that my children will inherit from my wife and me. Some are items of worth. Others are sentimental. All will have some value, at least to our kids, because of the life we share. However, the deposits we will leave *in* them are more enduring. Things like practicing peacemaking and reconciling

relationships, demonstrating trust in God as the Source by stewarding personal resources and hospitality in Jesus' name, crossing social divides in support of fellow image bearers of God, and prioritizing faith and community with a standing appointment that's not crowded out by kids' sports, birthday parties, and home-improvement projects. All these deposits reveal where we place our hope. Simply put, a living hope begins with a living faith!

When it comes to leaving a spiritual legacy, our influence extends beyond our children. There are many people whom I care about deeply who won't inherit a thing from me. But because of the resurrection of Jesus and the faith experiences that I have had throughout my life, I want to steward my influence in such a way that people experience the reality of God's redeeming love—long after I'm gone. What if we Christians began seeing our faith as a legacy-building endeavor whereby our primary mission is passing on a living faith and hope to those with whom we have influence?

As with parents leaving a legacy for their children, Christians should seek to make spiritual investments in the lives of those closest to us. When it comes to our pursuits, sometimes we follow with reckless abandon and passion. Other times we follow obediently or even out of obligation. Parenting is one of the most humbling pursuits. But it can also be the most formative, if we let it. It's hard to feel prepared, confident, or poised for what parenting throws your way. The same can be said of stewarding your faith. There's always more to learn and room to grow, so much so that it too often paralyzes earnest followers of Jesus from investing in the spiritual development of others.

But what is belief without action? And while we'll always feel like a spiritual work in progress, the great legacy question is *What can we do with what we have already experienced, learned, and overcome?*

This question is more pressing than ever. Our society's primary institutions have left an unfortunate legacy of a lack of credibility. Government, marriage, family, education, and even the church are hardly viewed today as trustworthy or effective in leading, much less supportive. We've seen the nuclear family crumble with marriage commitments increasingly based on feeling happy rather than as a laboratory for God to help us become holy. Resistance to government has exploded in even the most democratic settings. Religious ties have weakened, with a growing number of people spiritually curious but institutionally skeptical. And many churches are more invested in preserving and expanding their facilities than in being a social enterprise for God's redemptive plan.

This last point is particularly troubling for anyone who feels compelled to steward and pass on a living faith. In *The Church as Movement*, JR Woodward and Dan White Jr. describe the church as a "Christian-industrial complex," both an apt and an unfortunate description of many churches.¹ We've chosen growth in size over growth in disciplinemaking. Buildings get built, staff are added, and then instead of sending people out to live life on mission, we need people to return and help support the overhead. To grow ministries, we launch scalable programs to funnel believers into. This isn't bad in and of itself, but it has a way of mainly producing religious consumption. And the thing we all want—for faith in a living God to change people from

the inside out—doesn't occur in consumers. The discipling mission doesn't gain much-needed traction as Christians bounce around between churches for religious goods and services. And yet it is this work—the slow, relationship-driven craft of small-batch discipling—to which God has called us.

HANDCRAFTING A SPIRITUAL LEGACY

The words *follow me* loom large. Not because I read them in one of the Gospels but because I embraced them as an invitation. When I was twenty-two years old, my college pastor, Tim Elmore, asked if I wanted to be discipled. Having grown up in church, I associated that word with Sunday school, Bible study, and Scripture memorization. “Being discipled” sounded intense, like a church without fellowship.

This was not that.

Tim's invitation to discipleship was a chance to follow him closely and purposefully. It meant my being coached as much as our studying together. I was to become an apprentice, which meant there was as much “laboratory” time as there was “lecture” time. It was the experiment to the theory. As I began apprenticing with Tim, he laid the groundwork, saying, “Dave, you seem to already have a good basis in knowing Christ. I don't want to teach you anything new. I just want to make sure you know how to give away what you know.” No longer was my walk with God about me being saved or about going to heaven when I die, as if faith were a personal insurance policy. It was about a living faith that would align more people with life in Christ.

Then Tim said these unforgettable words, which are contrary

to how most church structures operate: “More time with fewer people equals greater Kingdom impact!” This shift opened my eyes to the present reality of God’s Kingdom on earth, here and now. But it also helped me realize that Jesus’ original intent for making disciples—the ordinary Christian life—meant spiritual reproduction. I wouldn’t be the first to suggest that the church doesn’t have a mission. Instead, the mission has a church: Make disciples.²

A disciple is one who, rooted in the love of Christ, (1) develops an ability to talk about personal faith; (2) grows an intentional spiritual practice; and (3) stewards and shares it with those closest to them. What if that basic definition became the everyday Christian life?

As we’ve noted, there’s a systemic problem in how we’ve approached God’s mission to make disciples. Truthfully, the church should look like a sending agent rather than a place to grow old and safe. We have a discipleship crisis primarily due to a one-size-fits-all, mass-produced approach to Christian education. When it comes to church, we mustn’t confuse the vision with the vehicle. Too often, people (leaders especially) baptize a way of doing church and lose sight of the vision. *Well, we need to teach the Word of God, the thinking goes, so therefore, we need a weekly teaching event.* But who does that study benefit most? The pastor or other speaker. What are some other ways to deliver vital content?

According to Barna Research, “one in four [Christians] says the practice of discipling others hasn’t been suggested to them (24%) or they haven’t thought about helping someone grow closer to God (22%).”³ That’s a problem. But to solve it, what’s needed isn’t more creative Bible teaching or higher-quality

services but a more effective way to integrate faith into life. We need simple faith expressions that reflect the heart of God personally. We need practices that form Christ in us and leverage our faith for others' benefit. We need practices, or rhythms, to impart a living faith—in word and deed—to those closest to us. Simply put, *disciples aren't mass-produced*.

The discipling process was never supposed to happen en masse. Spiritual formation doesn't happen by singing songs, observing Communion, and listening to biblical teaching. But that's how we do church: one size fits all. My passion is to help Christians see that discipling in small batches is the most effective way to live into our calling. We must learn how to train the few to reach the many.

Every generation holds a sacred trust to pass the baton of the transforming work of Christ to the next generation. Of course, the greatest witness of this testimony is found when individual disciples learn to talk about the difference Christ is making in them. I like to think this is what Jesus had in mind when He sent out the disciples in Luke 10 and told them to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Luke 10:9; also see Matthew 10:7). The greatest challenge facing Christianity today isn't persecution, political correctness, or scandals from within the church; too many believers give mental assent to basic Christian tenets without reorienting their life to prioritize life in Christ.

HOW A TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS WORKS

What if you could develop a new practice of small-batch discipling through regular but thoughtful expressions of faith? Rather than funneling people through the church, what

if you invested in their growth—and then lived out your faith *together in community*? This kind of intentional investment could help you discover a new kind of Christian purpose and spiritual legacy.

That's where the rhythm dynamics of this book come in. By faith, we move upward through rhythms of generosity, gratitude, and renewal. We strengthen the church body by practicing rhythms of community and apprenticing. And we grow outwardly, as missional practitioners, through rhythms of hospitality and compassion. When a significant event occurs or a life change happens, we tend to try to repeat the experience. We want to create a formula when, in fact, transformation is much more organic and unique than scalable. It's specific to individuals, unlike a one-size-fits-all process. There are things we can do, however, to make the soil fertile for impact and transformation. We could benefit from practical expressions of faith so that our hearts and lives might be further formed into the image of the living God!

It's not enough to just talk about our faith or celebrate having a similar belief as someone else. Spiritual growth is more than simply gaining information. These rhythms are a way of unifying a congregation so that we can *be* the church whether we're gathered or scattered throughout the week. It's a way to not only be a disciple but also become a disciplemaker.

The rhythms outlined here are not impactful by themselves; the truth is, many things contribute to one's spiritual formation. But they provide an intentional way to experience God's direction and desires. They offer ways to experience the Kingdom of God at work. Whether we are on the giving or receiving end of a disciplemaking relationship, these rhythms give the Holy Spirit

room to mold, expand, refine, and echo a living faith. Because it's a process, the change will never feel like winning the lottery, where one day you are suddenly rich. Instead, transformation is more like an alcoholic practicing sobriety daily for twenty years—they still live with tension and temptation each day. It's the same with us as we give our hearts to being formed into the image and righteousness of Christ Jesus. These rhythms offer a practical way to pursue a changed heart and life.

With spiritual reproduction in mind, I introduce these rhythms to offer a unique yoke to help us experience God, leverage our faith for others' benefit, and reproduce a living faith in those closest to us. These rhythms are not meant to be theologically exhaustive. Instead, I intend to create something intentionally relational, missional, and most of all, transferable. I hope we reimagine the church as a more thoughtful disciple-making community of faith.

RHYTHMS CREATE MOVEMENT

In the book of Acts, the Jews started carrying out a ministry in Jesus' name that they didn't even fully understand. At least, they didn't understand what it would become. At the time, they were still thinking of it as a ministry to "their people," that somehow they had cornered the market on the divine. Although the Jews were God's chosen people, God's redemption wasn't limited to them alone—and eventually, this movement led to something different from what the Jews expected . . . yet precisely what God intended. Ministry is about creating a movement. It's about planning the first steps, igniting the kindling, and seeing where it sparks and what lights into flame.

People create movements, not programs. Movements are harder to predict than programs, and creating them requires greater faith. But they also present the most significant opportunity for God’s plan to emerge.

The rhythms in this book are intended to create movement, both within us and within our communities. They present three opportunities:

1. *They enable us to experience the heart of God.* If the 2020 COVID-19 quarantine taught us anything, it’s that we need new ways to experience God when the band is not present to play live, the pastor is not there to teach, and the church is not gathered to hug, laugh, and pray together. Sure, we can connect with God individually through recorded preaching or a podcast, but it’s not the same as when we’re fully present with other believers. These rhythms provide ways to embody and express God’s heart.
2. *They leverage our faith for the benefit of others.* More than personal salvation from eternal damnation, faith should bring about “the peace and prosperity of the city [in which you live]. . . . Because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7). Faith needs outward expressions, and those expressions won’t always make it seem like there’s a return on our investment of time, money, and energy. Yet as we sow the seeds, God causes faith to germinate in people’s hearts and lives (1 Corinthians 3:6-9).

3. *They help us share with those closest to us.* From the beginning of Christianity, faith was meant to be reproduced (Luke 6:40; 10:1-24; 2 Timothy 2:2). The goal was not simply to bring others to Christ but also to disciple them. Spiritual reproduction is absent in programmatic, content-rich Christian education, and we can help fill in this gap. These rhythms can aid our attempt to impart a practical, dynamic, and articulate faith to our children and to other people we might disciple.

So what is belief without corresponding action? In light of the rhythms developed here, I want to encourage people toward an integrated, more intentional pursuit of faith. But this field guide is more than just a resource for personal spiritual disciplines; it offers you a way to invest your life and make disciples.

HOW TO USE THIS FIELD GUIDE

While I'm technically providing you with seven rhythms, really it's just one rhythm expressed in seven ways. Small-batch discipling is all about apprenticing in the way of Jesus. It's learning to instill in others the life in Christ that you have experienced to this point! I've heard too many accounts of earnest Christians who have grown up in the church and were active in youth group, mission trips, small groups, and even leadership say, if they were asked to disciple someone, "I wouldn't know what to say or where to start!" This field guide is offered as a manual to help you experience God, practice faith, and share with others in word and deed. Too often, discipleship

gets reduced to an exchange of information over coffee or in a classroom. This resource is intended to be a companion to people with a ministry outlet who serve together.

If you've been drawn to someone younger or newer in their faith and wanted to invest, this resource can help you equip them.

If you've ever been asked to mentor another person, this field guide will offer structure as you serve together.

If you're in an accountability group, part of a ministry, or on a leadership team, this framework is a way to think about forming Christ in you while you serve.

If you're a young couple entrusted with the spiritual leadership of children, this field guide can help you articulate and reproduce a living faith.

More than anything, it's for people of faith—on a journey with God—to have a resource to help them make disciples and accelerate the Kingdom of heaven on earth. My encouragement is to:

Read this with another person, presumably someone further along in their journey with Christ or someone you'd like to see grow and develop. Life change doesn't happen in a bubble. We need others to speak into our lives as much as we need to invest in others. Find a person or group to “think out loud” with.

Pair this reading with a ministry context. Since the focus is on putting into practice what we believe is true about God, identify a specific “laboratory” to experiment and express these rhythms together in. For instance, maybe you’re part of an elder team, children’s ministry, or other ministry team whose members would benefit from trying these rhythms with you, or perhaps you’re in a small group doing life together with intentionality. Or you might be a parent with friends also looking to instill a more integrated faith in their kids.

Read this with an eye to whom you might mentor using this resource. In other words, look to become a discipling Christian.

Take your time going through each rhythm. Take two to three weeks to discuss, study, and apply each chapter in this book. While it’s tempting to race through a chapter each week, I would encourage you not to reduce this to a seven-week book study. Instead, give the content time to work on you. Remember, discipling is a relational, intentional process.

Each chapter outlining a rhythm includes an interactive section called “Finding Your Rhythm.” This is a chance to personalize your experience, apply the rhythms, and help you find your voice to share with others. Take the time to think over the content, write down your responses, and talk it through.

Your work in these interactive sections will make a big difference in how this resource will impact you. If you blow past them, you will miss out on the more profound work involved in personal interaction or discussion. Keep in mind that these sections will become your own “lesson plans” to go through this field guide with someone else!

There are also discussion questions for each chapter. These questions are meant to be discussed with others, such as an apprentice, accountability partner, leadership team, small group, or your children. Tweak them to fit your context, and use them to help mobilize others.

TWO CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO BEGIN THIS JOURNEY

1. Who are you going through this developmental process with? Again, it's best not to read this field guide independently but instead to read it in community. This could be as a mentor, an apprentice, a team, or with a small group of peers.
2. What is your primary “laboratory” where you can experiment with and animate these rhythms? Define your lab as a ministry context where you're actively serving alongside one another.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How was faith expressed in your home growing up?
2. Who taught you to know Christ in a personal way? How did they show you this?

3. What are your earliest memories of thinking *That must be what God is like?*
4. Are there ways that your faith has gone further than or outgrown the faith of your parents?

THE RHYTHM OF APPRENTICING

Rediscovering Christianity's Mission and Trade

*[Jesus said,] "The student is not above the teacher,
but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher."*

LUKE 6:40

A FRIEND ONCE TOLD ME a funny story about a time she attended a baby shower. As she mingled with the other women, a hungry three-year-old boy was looking for his mother so she could breastfeed him. He was the baby of the family—the last of four kids—and he was struggling to be weaned. As he struggled to get the attention of his mother, the situation came to a boiling point. In the middle of this room filled with women, the frustrated toddler desperately looked around and cried out loudly, “Would someone here just feed me?”

COMING OF AGE

Growing up is hard to do at every stage. It's especially true when we're used to having things done for us. Everyone experiences

growing pains as they learn to become independent (and for some it takes a little longer than others), but eventually we learn how to do things for ourselves.

We understand what it means to grow up physically, but not as many people truly understand what it means to grow up spiritually. For those of us who go to church, we're immersed in a culture of consumption. Churches are built like a department store of religious goods and services where there's something for everyone. We go to church to be fed, and while that's not a bad thing, it's not the end goal. At some point, if our faith is going to be meaningful or impactful, we need to grow up spiritually. Growing up spiritually means that eventually, we will not only develop an ability to feed ourselves but also consider how we might nourish others.

The Hebrew model of learning was about *who* you followed. The Greek model was more about *what* you were studying. So the Hebrew model was more like a laboratory and shared experience, while the Greek model was more of a lecture focused on content. So much of modern-day discipleship elicits thoughts of Sunday school, Christian education, and/or going through a book with another person. But the rhythm of apprenticing suggests on-the-job training under the supervision of a journeyman. It's about having instruction, getting dirty, being led, and learning ministry. We can only grow so far on our own, looking from afar, applying what we know before we hit a wall . . . or a desert . . . or a storm. The potential for growth is more significant than ever, but we simply can't experience it without a guide or an apprenticing leader.

In Jesus' day, the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew

Bible) was considered a way of life. Many discussions centered around the most critical mitzvot (good deeds). The better the rabbi, the fewer the words and letters needed to summarize the commands. Daily discussions in Temple courts centered around these interpretations and which were most important. Debates could be won with a rabbi's ability to summarize the Book of the Law. When asked about the greatest mitzvot, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).¹ Jesus summarizes 613 commands with: *Love God* and *Love others as much as yourself*. This was a mic drop moment! No one else had ever cut through the legalism, points of emphasis, and sheer volume with this essential expediency!

Jesus says, "Come, follow," which is an invitation and an example. We ought to "yoke" our lives not only with someone who is further along than we are but also with someone who is earlier in their faith journey. In an agricultural society, Jesus' hearers would've understood the image of being yoked to God's commands. While God's commands might appear restrictive, they're to be understood as being for our good. And following requires more than simple acknowledgment; it requires practice. The metaphor doesn't end there, though. For their oxen to be effective in plowing, farmers yoke a young, energetic ox with an older ox. They find younger oxen tend to push hard at the beginning of the day, using up all their energy with nothing left for the second half. However, when yoked with an experienced

ox, a younger ox learns a needed rhythm so that he can last the whole day and keep an even, sustained pace. What a needed image for fruitful and sustaining faith!

While in Jesus' day many rabbis had made their interpretation and points of emphasis strict and legalistic, Jesus, a master rabbi Himself, came with a different invitation: "My yoke is easy [i.e., useful] and my burden [or load] is light" (Matthew 11:30). Perhaps Jesus was comparing the harsh rule of Roman oppression with the life-giving obedience to God's commands. Jesus wants to show what life in the Kingdom of God on earth looks like.

The good news is that most Christians already have what it takes to disciple or apprentice someone else, even if they don't feel ready to. Just like some parts of parenting are impossible to prepare for, it's impossible to feel ready for challenges associated with leading people at any age, with any background, and in any context. Instead, we must take the leap and honor God's call. That's where the rhythm of apprenticing comes in.

WHAT IS APPRENTICING?

Have you ever had a coach, teacher, youth worker, or family member see something in you and help bring it out? Few places in our society exist where people see and help develop personal potential. Yet this is the most significant way we can steward our influence! Apprenticeship is more than encouragement or advice giving—it is an arrangement in which someone learns an art, trade, or job under another person skilled in that area.

The best way to illustrate this is from my experience as a laborer. My dad was a journeyman-carpenter-turned-dentist. He was a man who was good at working with his hands and

didn't like the idea of paying someone to do a job that he could likely figure out on his own. And he wanted to instill that same ethic in me. When I returned from college in the summers, I worked in construction to learn the carpentry trade. While I only think of myself as a "rough carpenter" and not a craftsman, I still gained invaluable experience. One summer, I started work on a new build just as the foundation had been poured. In the following three months, I saw a house go from 20 percent to 80 percent completion. Each day was a chance to shadow skilled laborers handling various aspects of the building process. From handling different tools to being tasked with completing jobs, I got on-the-job training under the direction of seasoned tradespeople. Now I find myself doing similar projects with my kids, buying them tools, and watching them work—to pass this legacy on and see it grow in them, too.

Apprenticeship is a tradesperson's language: Learning a trade requires an on-the-job, hands-on relationship with someone with expertise in that trade. I believe we need the same type of relationships in Christian contexts in order to help believers mature in their faith. In a spiritual sense, apprenticeship is learning to animate the life of Christ in proximity to others. It is not about cloning or replicating others to look, talk, act, and even believe identically. Instead, apprenticing means identifying someone further along than you as well as finding newer or younger followers you can come alongside. It's finding a relational rhythm of stewarding one's influence, experience, knowledge, and understanding of Christ in the world.

A quick note about terms. I use the words *apprenticing* and *disciplemaking* interchangeably. While there might be some

nuance, they get at the same idea. Both terms are verbs that are active, dynamic, progressing, and unfolding, like life and relationships. In the ancient world, this was what it meant to be a disciple. More than just a student of your rabbi's faith life, you were to learn about your rabbi's whole life. The term *mentoring* conveys a similar idea. No matter which term you prefer to use, the kind of developmental relationship I'm talking about here is experiencing and expressing the Christian life incarnationally, missionally, and with the intent of spiritual reproduction.

Sometimes this happens in organic and informal ways where gifts are applied, weaknesses are observed, and impressions are made. Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." To be sure, we all need (and need to become) examples to follow. Stewarding one's faith with words and practice is a critical response to a Christian witness. But apprenticeship goes even further.

In the context of small-batch discipling, one of the most significant opportunities we have is to speak to someone's potential. The discipler's role is to see the potential in another person—seeing who they can become in Christ based on their gifts, strengths, personality, desires, and experience—and to help identify a trajectory for them in ministry and leadership.

When I meet a younger believer, I often like to begin statements with "I see in you . . ." because people need help seeing what they can't see for themselves. Maybe they lack confidence or have never been given a chance. Perhaps no one's ever expressed belief in them. God wants to unleash their potential for helping, serving, and leading. As a mentor, you get to be

part of that commissioning. When you know someone well enough to evaluate their abilities and help them see who they can become, you provide an alternative to self-loathing, shame, and struggling self-esteem. The best teachers and coaches do this, but finding someone to draw a trajectory of who we can become is rare. This is not prosperity coaching but a developmental journey you and your apprentice take together.

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul implores Timothy not just to teach but to train. He writes, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” Instead of merely transferring knowledge to people, we are instructed to teach others how to lead others. This is spiritual reproduction that is central to the great commission. It’s good to go through foundational content together (i.e., Scripture, outlines, or books), but this is not just to reinforce fundamental Christian beliefs or teach anything new. Jesus invited disciples to “come, follow Me,” and He used His influence with them, His understanding of God’s mission, and everyday circumstances to train them. See if this model feels familiar from what you’ve read in the Gospels:

I do it, and *you watch*. I do it, and *you help*.

You do it, and *I watch*. You do it, and *someone else watches*.

We can do a lot entirely on our own to change, grow, and develop. Yet another person who knows us well and can speak to our potential can be invaluable in this process. That person can remind us of who we are and can know when something’s amiss. Life-changing relationships—the kind Jesus hosted

with His closest followers—are created through invitation and challenge. He invited them to “come, follow Me” and challenged them to “go into all the world, teaching them everything I have taught you” (Matthew 28:19, PAR). In the garden of Gethsemane, He asked them to pray and then challenged them to stay awake (Matthew 26:36-46). He invited them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and challenged them not to take any additional provisions with them (Matthew 10:1-15). In every close relationship that Jesus had, He included an invitation to learn something and a sincere challenge to grow in its application. Invitation and challenge were how He would build His church through disciples.

Most Western churches hold to a content-heavy, event-based educational philosophy, which encourages us to follow “at the feet of” educated clergy and religious personalities rather than live “in the shadow of” our disciplers. This has cost Christianity essential apprenticeship, formation, and mission! What if, instead, we think of Christian apprenticeship as equal parts education (content), equipping (training), and immersion (experience)?

THE RHYTHM OF APPRENTICING: JESUS’ “IDEA”

In Robert Coleman’s influential book *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, he reveals how Jesus’ three-year public ministry had a laser-like focus: *training the few to reach the many*.² Jesus wasn’t set on launching a service and attracting a crowd. While He did engage the masses, these times with the crowds were illustrative and meant to equip the disciples for His eventual absence.

You remember the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, right? We assume the story's focus is the five thousand people who needed something to eat. But in reality, most of these people were probably unaware that a miracle was occurring. The masses were gathered in a field without a public address system. They had no cameras or stadium monitors. They didn't know how many fish Jesus started with; they were just happy to get a free meal. But the Twelve acted as ushers in a sea of people. They were likely the only ones who realized that the baskets weren't running out of fish and chips! Jesus was focused on spiritually instilling in them a kind of living faith. Jesus created "laboratory" environments where He'd give the disciples a chance to experiment with faith, learning, power, and authority.

The idea of being a spiritual leader is daunting for most, but it's not impossible. As I began my apprenticing journey with my college pastor, Tim introduced me to Jesus' "IDEA." Perhaps the most significant difference between the early church and the church today is that we've gotten away from Jesus' strategy of training the few to train many. Most development, including on-the-job training, is focused on training to produce, perform, or manage. Rarely, if ever, is attention directed at training people to train others. We miss out on spiritual reproduction and, ultimately, multiplication. Yet spiritual reproduction on any scale creates a significant personal impact and an enduring legacy. So how can we step into the role of an effective mentor?

We can study how the Master Disciplemaker mentored others. Jesus' intentional approach to crafting disciples and growing faith has four main components:

1. **I**nstruction,
2. **D**emonstration,
3. **E**xperience, and
4. **A**ssessment.

Let's look at each component of Jesus' "IDEA" approach in turn.

Instruction

Teaching an apprentice biblical truth and how to lead in ministry is good, but teaching them how to ask good questions is even better. As I entered a discipling relationship with Tim, Christianity became more than a cultural or family expression. It became a living faith. That is, it became something to nurture, practice, trust, share, and leverage for good. I was invited into proximity with my mentor, and I was eager to give whatever time I had to be available. I could observe Tim's marriage, family, leadership, and ministry up close. I got to ask lots of *Why?* questions. I began serving and leading with constant feedback, which meant that I had someone gently speaking to my potential growth, undeveloped strengths, and limiting blind spots.

Demonstration

Apprenticeship involves modeling what ministry looks like and what is required, personally and publicly, of a mentor. Tim demonstrated a concept that still pays dividends. He said, "David, it's not too difficult for someone to lead others who are younger. And most people can offer some guidance and leadership among

peers. But to be effective in leadership, you need to learn to find your voice and encourage people who might be your parents' age." And then he went on to demonstrate this. Though he was only in his thirties, Tim led the Global Missions Committee, which was comprised of people in their fifties, sixties, and seventies, ranging from business leaders to retired grandparents. Tim guided discussions, fielded requests, and managed action items while giving this diverse team strategic ownership of the vision for reaching unreached people groups.

Experience

After teaching and modeling, it is good to give opportunities for responsibility as you observe that the mentee is ready. Let the person being discipled take the lead in teaching a class, facilitating a group discussion, hosting an event, organizing a ministry initiative, or guiding a team. In my willingness to "come and follow" with Tim's guidance, I was expected to be helpful in ministry but also challenged to grow in leadership. I joined our global missions team to help coordinate international trips. I also led a weekly ministry team and followed up with every visitor who indicated they wanted to learn more about the Christian faith. I didn't feel qualified, but Tim supported me. I had instruction and demonstration and was trusted with vital ministry to gain needed experience. And there were regular times for feedback, coaching, and suggestions. This was Jesus' strategy of training the few to reach the many!

Please note: The experience you're gaining is valuable whether the path you're on is toward vocational ministry or not. The world is desperate for ministers beyond the church

walls. The point is to gain experience in practicing a living faith that—in a curated way that’s unique to you and your voice—could be used to invest in someone else. This is where these rhythms become most helpful. Whether you’re a teaching assistant at an elementary school, a Little League coach, a tradesman, a retiree, or working alongside a professional colleague who’s sorting through what it means to have a living faith, you’re helping advance God’s Kingdom. These rhythms become a basis for a relational, incarnational, and missional life together.

Assessment

I vividly remember being invited to meet Tim in his office and asked to close the door behind me. He said, “David, this is what I heard. This is what I said in your defense. Now, tell me if you made a liar out of me.” To be honest, I don’t even remember the misunderstanding (there were many). What I remember was his support. He knew my character and my immaturity. I was afforded the benefit of the doubt *and* lots of mentoring. Accountability and correction were easier to accept because I understood that Tim had my best interests in mind. He saw potential and would often share what he could see in me.

If we think of apprenticing within this framework, any Christian can instill a spiritual legacy in another by offering a little instruction, modeling Jesus’ life, giving experiences, and offering feedback.

Create a feedback loop. Evaluate ministry and relationships together. Create a culture of telling on yourselves. What was

good, and what could've been better? Were there missed opportunities? This is a chance to reveal potential blind spots in how an apprentice comes across or sounds.

APPRENTICING MOVES AT THE SPEED OF A RELATIONSHIP

The four pieces of the IDEA framework are simple enough, but they may take time. Apprenticing is a slow, painstaking process. It moves at the speed of a relationship, not in chapters, semesters, seasons, or deadlines.

I've found a helpful illustration of this kind of apprenticing faith in a perhaps surprising place: twelve-step recovery groups. The genius of a twelve-step recovery program is that part of working out your sobriety means finding someone else to sponsor you.

If you've ever been part of a recovery meeting, you know there's a level of honesty required by the group. Alcoholics Anonymous makes room for everyone—poor, wealthy, educated, tradesman, single, married, young, old, liberal, conservative—as long as you're willing to be honest about your struggle and to take the next step. Addictions have a way of leveling the playing field and cutting away all pretense. Yet there's not only fiercely guarded safety in sharing; you also won't have to take the next step alone. When a person enters a twelve-step recovery plan, step 12 encourages you to “sponsor” someone beginning at step 1. Step 1 is when someone is finally able to say they have a problem and are powerless to help themselves. Even after you complete all twelve steps, you still battle temptation. You still feel like you're vulnerable and have room to grow. You know you need a community, *and* you need to give

yourself to someone taking their first steps—or revisiting those first steps—toward sobriety.

If every Christian approached faith this way, it would transform our faith experience and revolutionize the church!

If salvation is to a Christian as sobriety is to an alcoholic, we need to have a vision to be similarly invested in one another's spiritual growth, for their sake as much as for our own. We all come to Christ the same way, willing to admit that we have a problem and are living at the center of our own stories in a broken world. And the good news isn't merely God offering us forgiveness for being self-absorbed and imperfect. God seeks to restore and redeem a broken world, and we get to be part of this restoration! And did you catch this? We participate in Kingdom work by *giving our lives away!* And perhaps the most transformational part of this process is when we find ways to apprentice or disciple another.

THE FAITH OF AN APPRENTICE

When the apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, he reminded him of their work together in previous travels. Together, they had served, taught, developed leaders, and planted churches. Having sent out Timothy on his own, Paul challenged him not just to be a great leader for the Kingdom of God but also to be a mentor to other believers. Paul wrote, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2, NASB).

So what do you look for in a potential apprentice? It might be helpful to use the acronym FAITH to begin to either select or become an apprentice.

Faithful. Do they demonstrate a commitment to Christ? Are they already helpful in an area of ministry and service?

Available. Can they put in the time needed to meet and do ministry together?

Initiative. Are they self-motivated and hungry to learn and grow?

Teachable. Are they humble or defensive? Are they willing to change, try new things, and be accountable? Are they ready to be transparent and self-aware? Do they struggle with different authority figures in their life?

Healthy and Helpful. Is this person in a place to both give and receive challenges and invitations? Are they ready for a developmental relationship or possibly better suited for an accountability group or even a counseling relationship? One question worth asking is *Who are the healthiest people—spiritually and emotionally—you're closest to?*

APPRENTICING IN FOCUS

When you're looking for a model of early apprenticeship, the relationship between Paul and Barnabas in Acts is particularly instructive. Early in his faith walk, Paul was a man in need of a mentor. He had to live down a reputation of being overzealous and aggressive. I imagine he battled regret, shame, and even fear. He couldn't undo his past transgressions. Yet he had the basic tools: passion, hunger, knowledge, and a personal encounter

with the risen Christ. That was enough for Barnabas to begin coaching him.

We don't know a whole lot about Barnabas. But the little we do know makes a strong statement about his commitment to investing in Paul as a young leader. Barnabas had some financial means, and in what we might imagine to be an idyllic early-church setting after Pentecost, he did his part to ensure “no needy persons [were] among them” (Acts 4:34).³

From time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

ACTS 4:34-37

It says something about him that he had the means to own a piece of land. And it says a lot more that he'd sell it on behalf of the community's needs.

It doesn't seem like Barnabas needed a job description or to be asked to help. We know he was part of the early-church community and maybe even hosted a church in his home. But the next time we see Barnabas mentioned is in Acts 9: He appeared after the conversion of Paul when no one else wanted to go near him!

When [Paul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

ACTS 9:26-30

I suspect Barnabas sought Saul out when he first arrived, to know him firsthand. Barnabas saw something in Saul that few others did, something in him beyond his regretted past. He gave Saul counsel and maybe tried to soften his edges. Saul needed a bridge builder, which he found in Barnabas, who may have been putting his own relationship with the apostles on the line by embracing Saul. In Acts 9:27, we read “Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.” The Greek word translated as *took* (*epilambanomai*) implies that he led Saul by the hand before the apostles to affirm his belief in Paul, his conversion, and his new life in Christ.

Later, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul and began collaborating with him, developing him, believing in him, and traveling with him as his sponsor. Paul then invited Barnabas

on a second missionary trip, but they had an argument over whether to take a young apprentice named John Mark with them. On the first journey, Mark had deserted them. Ironically, Paul was done with him, but Barnabas wanted to take him on the second journey to give him a second chance. As a result, Barnabas and Mark parted ways with Paul.

Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left.

ACTS 15:37-40

How could Barnabas, the mentor, leave Paul at this point? Wasn't this a coaching moment to help Paul with a personality clash or a gentle reminder of where he started? Perhaps the lesson to be learned from Barnabas's decision to take Mark with him to Cyprus is that no one peaks in their performance until another person believes in them. In a beautiful picture of reconciliation, the apostle Paul later came full circle in his opinion of Mark, writing, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Becoming an apprenticing leader is not about being an expert. It's simply about being willing to share what you do know. What's most helpful and will impact lives is when we

learn to put words to the difference Christ makes in our daily struggles and mundane situations. Consider that Barnabas didn't need a position, a title, or recognition to make a difference. He wasn't recruited but instead willingly invested his life, staked his reputation, and gave his time to take Paul under his wing. If we look at this as a case study for investing our lives, we can make a few simple but critical observations.

1. *Barnabas spoke to and about Paul's potential.* We aren't privy to their one-on-one conversations, but one thing is clear: Barnabas staked his own reputation when he brought Paul to the apostles to speak on Paul's behalf. His message? This guy has changed; he can grow and be part of leading this Kingdom of God movement!
2. *They shared ministry.* As I've said before, discipleship requires a "laboratory," not just a lecture or a book. The way to reveal a living faith is by living your faith out in serving and doing what you believe in. Just like the way you parent by practice and not by proxy, doing ministry together provides an opportunity to challenge assumptions, model strategies, and develop skills. Most people want to grow, but many miss out on a critical element of the process. Some are given responsibility but without proper instruction. Others gain experience yet receive little feedback. Mentoring means identifying opportunities to help equip and inspire. Consider this as you prepare to seek to multiply the life of Christ in another: Your ability to "pass the baton" and see others run will create a lasting impact.

3. *We can imagine that Barnabas held Paul accountable.* It's fascinating to me that for as much impact as Barnabas had in advocating for the apostle Paul, we don't hear about him again. But we see how he shaped Paul's church-planting ministry by raising leaders. In Paul's letter to Philemon, he advocated for the runaway-slave-turned-brother-in-Christ Onesimus. I wonder if it's Barnabas's coaching we hear in the background as Paul penned this letter from jail. This kind of growth and development happens only by investing, caring accountability.

Noted storyteller Jonah Sachs said, "The mentor's role is to make change irresistible but not mandatory."⁴ It's not as much about enforcing rules as about reminding them of who they are, what they're capable of, and what you believe is possible. In a trusting relationship, we need people to hold up a mirror to our lives and show us what it looks like. For example, "When you say that . . . it sounds like this . . ." Or "I'm not sure you realize it, but when you do this . . . it can come across like . . ." It's a gentle but effective method to suggest a better way.

4. *Barnabas was open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.* Whether it was a prompt to divest himself of property on behalf of the faith community or the poor, discerning an authentic change in Paul when every other believer feared him, or being willing to let Paul move on without him because of feeling led to give John Mark a second chance, Barnabas had a sensitivity and an obedience to the Spirit of God. Jesus often painted

a picture of the disciples doing what he did and talked of them discipling others. He sent them off in pairs so that they could lean on each other. He got them used to working together rather than alone. He expected their faith would be transferable—the knowledge, the conviction, and the concern for others' spiritual growth.

Again, the mission of the church is to make disciples, not converts, volunteers, attendees, or members. Discipleship might involve all those things. But it must go much deeper. For faith to take root, we have to leave room for discomfort as much as we embrace comfort. We need to allow for sacrifice as much as we want to allow for provision. This is how faith grows. It's how it becomes believable. It's how it transforms hearts. The good news is that we can all identify with the struggles, hurdles, valleys, and deserts already. And it's when we look back that we might even begin to see the hand of God in the sequence of our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a skill or trade you learned over time. Who guided you and then critiqued your development? Can you identify any “breakthrough” moments in your process? If you were primarily self-taught, what did you miss by not having someone more skilled or further along mentoring you?
2. How do you think being a disciple differs from being a convert or believer?

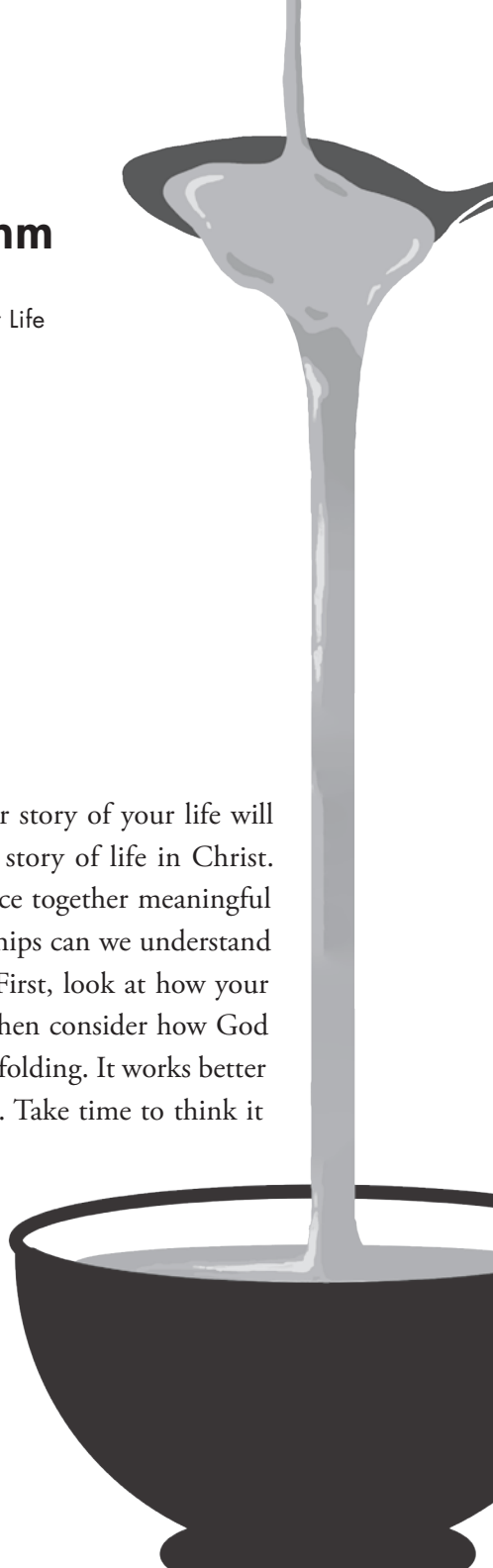
3. What do you think made Jesus' disciples good candidates to build the future of the church on?
4. What lessons did they learn? What obstacles did they overcome or endure?
5. Has anyone ever referred to you as a mentor? In what way? What do you think it meant to them?
6. Can you point to someone you've intentionally invested in? What were the goals and outcomes of this investment?
7. What metaphor comes to mind when you think of being and becoming an apprentice? Is there a film, story, analogy, or Scripture passage that would help you instill this rhythm in your life?

Finding Your Rhythm

Your Apprenticing Timeline:
Finding God in the Sequence of Your Life

IDENTIFYING GOD in the larger story of your life will help you share with others your story of life in Christ. Only when we step back and piece together meaningful events, experiences, and relationships can we understand and articulate our stories better. First, look at how your life has unfolded to this point. Then consider how God was present and at work in the unfolding. It works better to avoid doing this in one sitting. Take time to think it over and revisit it a few times.

It's hard to see God's hand in a particular event, especially in the present. It isn't until we look back later that we gain insight as to how God was at



work. Maybe it helps to think of the series of events like footprints in the sand. If we can begin to find God's activity in the sequence, we can understand how God might guide, equip, and call us to serve. As you start to think through critical moments in your spiritual life, consider the following questions.

1. How can you see God in the progression of your life? In other words, are there doors that are closed?
2. Which doors have opened in the last two to three years (jobs, relationships, invitations, opportunities)?

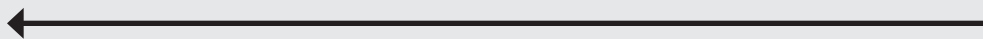
The timeline below asks questions like *Where have you been?* and *What events, people, decisions, and opportunities have shaped your life in Christ?* Remember, closed doors are part of God's confirmation. While they might be disappointing, they provide the guidance we seek from God.

MAPPING YOUR TIMELINE

Think through the following three categories, and map your responses on the timeline on pages 40-41.

1. *Peaks and valleys.* What major events and circumstances have marked your life's journey to this point? They can be positive or negative. On your timeline, list above and below the line significant decisions, people, accomplishments, and events that have shaped you into who you are today. (Remember: This is hard to do in one sitting. It's helpful to come back to it as you think through the impact of formative times.)

2. *Speed bumps, detours, and the scenic route.* What were some speed bumps along the way? Even with goals in mind, you can't avoid adversity and setbacks. You absorbed and overcame these lows along the way. While you may never want to go through them again, they likely proved to be formative. Consider the following questions:
- What struggles in the past helped shape your faith and resolve today?
 - Did you get helpful, surprising, or unsettling feedback?
 - What doors closed? Where did you hear the clearest nos?
 - Are there any difficult circumstances that, in looking back, you realize God has used to strengthen your faith or character?
3. *Themes and lessons.* What themes seem to recur in your conversations, relationships, or Scripture reading? Are there subjects you return to regularly in prayer or reading? (A few examples include community, obedience, calling, surrender, lordship, generosity, spiritual gift identification, personal intimacy with God, concern for the vulnerable and marginalized, and service during different seasons of growth.)
- Can you think of significant life events or key decisions that shaped your life in Christ?
 - Was there a relationship that taught, encouraged, or challenged you to address a blind spot that was inhibiting your growth?



EARLY LIFE



PRESENT

APPLYING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Memorize 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

Begin applying this verse as you serve in ministry with and for others. Also begin thinking about, discussing with others, and asking God whom you might apprentice and minister alongside.