

# All Honor to The King- The Narrow Way

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5/19/2023 V3.1

## God's work in my life:

The proverb, "Wine is a mocker and strong drink is a brawler" was true for my family as my parents were divorced by the time, I was 4 years old. But despite my broken alcoholic family God began demonstrating His love, grace, and mercy to me when I was 6 years old.

There were limited job opportunities for single moms in the 50s, but she found work as a cocktail waitress. She worked nights and weekends and I didn't see her for weeks at a time. To care for me, she found an apartment where the landlady was paid to watch over me. Sadly, the landlady's care was very poor. My daily diet consisted of a cheap hamburger patty, SpaghettiOs, and whatever I could find. I was often very hungry. I avoided her as much as possible and spent significant time in the apartment alone. Despite the poor care, my biggest problem was tremendous loneliness which is impossible for me to describe.

A few days after turning 5, I entered the first grade. And I was a very immature five-year-old. The lack of adult interaction aggravated several challenges in my life. Left to my own devices, I became a mean, grungy little kid who got into a lot of fights. I was very disruptive in class and it is safe to say that I was not any of the teacher's pets which contributed to me not learning to read. Mom depended on and trusted the teachers to be professionals. So, she agreed that I should repeat the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. However, I didn't get any more help, which continued through the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. Before entering the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we moved to a rural school. Sadly, the new teacher was also from the previous school system and she also failed to be any help.

However, the school board consisted of farmers and when they saw a recommendation for another social promotion, they had a lot of questions. Questions that the teacher didn't have good answers for. She was given a second year to help me learn to read. So, we repeated the 4<sup>th</sup> grade together. However, she still didn't spend much time with me, I still couldn't read, and after that year I never saw her again. Thankfully, the 5th-grade teacher diligently worked with me, and with much prayer and effort, I finally learned to read.

Going back a few years, when I was 6 years old, I was loitering in the park on a summer day and someone presented the Gospel. There was no question that I was a sinner, so I eagerly received God's love and forgiveness and I asked Jesus into my heart.

However, the lack of adult interaction from parents, teachers, or other adults, including anyone from the Church continued, so I knew very little about anything. My behavior was so bad that most of my schoolmates had strict instructions to not play with me. I lived on a proverbial deserted island which added to my loneliness.

One day, God prompted me to pray so I began to talk and think with Him. In the beginning, I was very inconsistent and sometimes there were long periods between when I would spend time with Him. After a long silence, it was as if God gently tapped me on the shoulder, "Do you remember me?" I would ask His forgiveness and try harder to remember Him. Over time, the gaps grew less and less, and while I didn't

know it at the time, God built a friendship with me. I didn't hear voices but I asked Him questions, shared thoughts, and ideas, and He prompted me with thoughts, questions, and sometimes instructions.

I wasn't aware of the depth of the friendship God was building with me, but one day I was startled when I realized that my agonizing loneliness was gone. Some may say that my relationship with God was my imagination but even my creative abilities were not capable of overcoming the tremendous loneliness that I had felt.

My friendship with God began changing my life but it was a very slow process. Sadly, despite my relationship with Him, as I grew older my moral life degraded as lying, cheating, stealing, and other sins crept into my life. To my shame, I was able to compartmentalize when I spent time with God from when I fulfilled my selfish wants and desires. I shudder to think what God endured with me.

When I was 13, while walking along, minding my business, the Lord Jesus Christ confronted me. I can't say it was a vision, I can't say it was not, but I was in His presence. It is not possible to explain, but I still remember being surprised at how totally immersed I was in God's love. His love permeated every fiber of my being. Before, that time, God's love was an intellectual concept, but after that, God's love gripped me. Understanding and embracing God's love has been a priceless gift and I believe that all Believers should diligently search for this treasure.

While being enveloped by God's love, I intuitively understood the Lord Jesus Christ's power, authority, and holiness. And, my sins began to flow through my mind. **There was no room to argue or to justify them.** Standing before His holiness and righteousness, I quickly confessed and repented from each of my sins and determined to forsake them. I later understood that was when I made Jesus Christ the Lord of my life. However, I did not make Him Lord, **out of obligation, fear, ritual, or religion but as an expression of love back to God.**

When I look back at my younger years, it is clear that He was changing my life from the inside out. God was building a friendship with me before, but afterward, I began an abiding relationship with Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ's holiness was obvious, so it was natural to sincerely respect Him (or to fear the Lord). My fear of God is not from obligation or dread but His love gives me the power and desire to delight in Him, His laws, and His standards (Psalms 1:2), which has also been a valuable gift. I make no claims of being wise but "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" and as I have walked with Him, He has revealed many things about His heart. And a constant awareness of His presence has been a tremendous joy that has been transforming that mean, grungy kid.

A constant awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ is like sitting at a table with Him. I'm there, He is there, and when temptation sits down, I see the temptation, and I may or may not look at Him, but I know He is there. Many times, I brush the temptation aside. But sometimes I begin to dwell on it and if I dwell on it long enough the result is sin. But He is there and I know that it is just a matter of time before I will need to confess the sin and cling to God's love and forgiveness. While God forgives me, all sin carries negative consequences and He seldom removes the fruits of sin. However, repentance is of great value, and just as when God confronted me, seeing His forgiveness reinforces His unconditional love for me. And the power and desire of His love strengthens me to obey and serve Him.

Sometimes my devious heart will dwell on a temptation but only for a fraction of a second, as if to sneak something by. However, God challenges me to speak truth within my heart. So, I try to identify temptations as quickly as possible and not let them by, even if it is only for a very short time.

When I asked Jesus into my heart, I knew nothing about anything but God continued to reveal Himself to me. Between the time that God confronted me and graduating from high school, my friendship with God developed into a constant awareness of His presence. I am a very long way from perfection but I am so thankful for His love, our friendship, and the changes He has made in my life.

Note: Some have expressed sympathy when they hear about the trials that God allowed during my childhood. But as I have enjoyed a close friendship and a constant awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ, those early years of development, while painful, are infinitely valuable to me.

### **Not a Pretty Picture:**

Going back a few years, during my second 4th-grade year, God prompted me to attend Sunday School and later Church in our local Bible Church. I knew most of my Church peers from school. Because of what was missing in my family I searched for friendships among those Christian families. By high school, I knew most of them in our small community and believed that the parents were sincere Christians and they loved their children. However, before we graduated, most of my peers rejected the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was one of the few from a non-Christian family which gave me some unique perspectives. They had all professed faith in Christ, were baptized when they were younger, and spent their whole life in Church but by the time we graduated, 19 out of 20 of them rejected Him, pursuing drinking, parties, and sex. I was amazed at how rebellious my Church peers were and found it very strange that so many of them rushed down the same paths of destruction that were destroying my family.

Because we were going in different directions, I had no close friends through high school. The alcohol at home created tremendous stress so not having supportive friends was not new, but it was not helpful. However, God used that time to strengthen our relationship and He sustained me through rough times.

Shortly before entering high school, a new pastor arrived. I was in his target ministry and was one of the few that responded, so he spent a fair amount of time with me. I really appreciated him and by my senior year thought that we were friends. However, after graduation, I went to college and the friendship grew cold. Sadly, I found this to be a pattern with many of my college "friends". Especially those who pursued full-time ministry. As long as I was perceived to be of value, there was a relationship, but relationships quickly dissolved when I was not useful or was able to financially support them.

While spending time with that pastor I came to understand some of the challenges and pressures that pastors, especially in small churches face. So, after college, I adopted a goal to befriend and encourage pastors. Over the next 20 years, I attempted to encourage about a dozen men in full-time ministry. I knew that they would not be able to add much to the relationships, but most of those relationships were even more one-sided and thankless than I ever imagined.

What was more discouraging was that about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of those men lost major moral battles, were kicked out of their ministries, and most lost their families. One committed suicide. Sadly, that trend was fairly typical and has continued to be widespread in the Church.

But I continued to have hope for the remaining men. Most maintained stricter self-discipline and went on to have “successful” ministries, but many of them built barriers (bubbles) around themselves. They looked “shiny” morally and spiritually but the more successful their ministries, the stronger they maintained their barriers and the more authority they claimed. Their bubbles made it impossible to know who they really were. They hid their failures and made it impossible for them to develop any significant relationships. Either with me or as I could tell with anyone else.

I appreciate when Christians are focused and want to accomplish great things for God but I have come to believe that the value Christians place on those that God brings into their lives reveals their true heart. Relationships require time, energy, and possibly money so a willingness to build and maintain friendships reveals genuine love. When relationships are avoided or sacrificed on the altar of ministries, significant questions are raised about their motives and ultimately their relationship with God. Bubbles make it very difficult for them to express love and effectively disciple Believers or their children. I suspect that this is the root cause of why there are so many Pastor's Kids (PKs) and Missionary Kids (MKs). When relationships with children and marriages are casualties, Biblical standards declare such individuals to not be qualified to be in leadership positions (1 Timothy 3:2-8). Sadly, “success” has often been placed above God's standards.

**Love:** It is no surprise that the Lord Jesus Christ had close friendships with the disciples, as was revealed when the Apostle John wrote, “the disciple whom Jesus loves”. Jesus had the most critical mission of all time but love was so important, He still took the time to build close relationships with many.

The Apostle Paul was involved in many critical ministries but he truly loved fellow believers as brothers, sisters, or in the case of Timothy as a son. One of Paul's expressions of his deep love for the Brothern was, “I have you in my heart”. Paul's expression of his love for Believers is threaded through his writing. And despite Paul's many spiritual successes and spectacular accomplishments, he made it very clear that without love he was nothing. So, given the Lord Jesus Christ's and Paul's examples, **it has not been clear why so many pastors have failed to follow their examples.**

Thankfully, we have found genuine love and genuine fellowship with some Believers and a few Pastors.

**Contrasts:** After college and marriage, our second child was born with severe medical issues and we spent 3 months in intensive care with her. The medical challenges were staggering and we were very overwhelmed but God sustained us.

Adding to the challenges, we have to say that there was very little love and support from most of our Christian “friends”. Many disappeared. One of the few that visited us in the hospital made the statement, “You must have some dark sins in your life for God to allow such a tragedy”. We had too many challenges at the time to pay attention to such comments, but later, I wondered if the attitude was representative of why so many of our Christian friends left us.

An important conclusion of our experience with our daughter is that God allows trials and needs in Believer's lives to bring fellow Believers closer together. Out of duty, the assistant Pastor of our Church

called once, but that was the extent of the support from that local Church. We befriended several doctors and nurses at the hospital. Most were not believers but many of them attended an informal memorial service for our daughter in our front yard. I don't remember very many Christian friends. God faithfully sustained us and we don't hold any animosities but looking back there are serious questions as to why there was so little love, support, or friendship from our Christian community.

In contrast, I grew up within my parent's circle of drinking buddies. They were slaves to a cruel taskmaster and they had many problems so there shouldn't ever be a need to compare them with Christians. However, the qualities of their friendship and genuine hospitality have put most of the Christians that I have known to shame. When one of them had an emergency, there was no hesitation to ask for help, to give help, or to receive help. No questions were asked. There were disagreements between them but they seldom destroyed their relationships.

As an example, on one Friday night, one of their buddies was arrested for DUI. The hubbub woke me at about 2:00 am and I listened to the rescue effort from my room. They did not want their friend to wait in jail until Monday morning, but bail was about a typical month's pay. The problem wasn't to find who would help but who had that much cash on hand. Despite being in the middle of the night I heard no reservations, apologies, or the need to promise to repay the money. After several calls, the cash was found and their buddy was rescued. The money was returned and the incident was never mentioned again. After our experience with our daughter, I have often wondered if I were in a similar situation, guilty or not, how many Christian friends would I be able to call?

Again, "Wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler". One night, after heavy drinking, a fistfight broke out and the party abruptly ended. This was a relatively rare occurrence but what was impressive was that each of those involved showed up the next morning, black eyes and all, and asked for forgiveness. That incident was also forgotten. Sadly, over the years there have been many disagreements among Christians that were not as severe, but never resolved.

I was very careful but there was **never** any doubt that I would be welcomed into any of their houses, at any time, or that I would be given help if I ever needed it. How is it possible that a group of alcoholics demonstrated more love, compassion, friendship, and hospitality than we have seen from most Christians? Shouldn't Christians reflect some of the unconditional love that they receive from God?

One possibility is that many Christians have accepted Jesus as their savior but they do not have much of a relationship with Him. Which may explain why so many feel the need to earn and maintain God's acceptance. But such efforts usually only make individuals very "religious". Sadly, this seems to be the case for some in full-time ministry. They have tremendous zeal to accomplish great things for God's Kingdom and sacrifice everything to accomplish their goals, but very little love is evident in their lives. God gives stern warnings that accomplishing great things for God's Kingdom should never be considered to be valid evidence of a relationship with Him (Matthew 7:21-23).

When the Lord Jesus Christ confronted me, I had a glimpse of God's perfect holiness and I testify with complete confidence that it is not possible to even approach God's righteousness on our own efforts. This truth is fully supported in the Scriptures. And seeing His perfect love, any such efforts are unnecessary. Also fully supported in the Scriptures. God delights in Agape love but He is not pleased when love and

relationships are sacrificed to achieve accomplishments. Many claim that they are saved by faith alone but their extreme need to earn God's approval implies that they don't really believe it.

### **Fellowship:**

We have faithfully attended Bible-teaching Churches for over 60 years but for more than half of the time, we saw very little love, support, or friendship. During the desolate years, we continued to attend out of obedience so it is easy to understand why some Christians stop attending Church. During the dry years, we moved around between Churches which allowed us to meet and know a variety of Christians and sit under the teaching of several Pastors, but we found very few friendships.

By the time I was in my 40s, 20 years after college I began to wonder if I was the problem. But God brought some dear brothers and sisters into our lives. Before then, I considered friendship, comradery, and fellowship to be roughly equivalent. However, when I saw *real* fellowship, it became clear that fellowship exists on a much deeper level than friendship.

[1 John 1:5-8](#) This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But **if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

When Believers abide in Christ and walk in the light, the potential for fellowship with others who walk in the light is significant. **Fellowship is a reflection of two Believer's relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ.** The closer they walk with God; the more love emanates through their lives, resulting in genuine fellowship. As I began to understand and identify fellowship, it became clear that we had fellowship with a few of our older Christian friends, but in comparison with all of the Christians that we knew, it was a very small group.

It is difficult to know what is in someone's heart or the true nature of their relationship with God, but if fellowship is missing, there should be considerable concern, "[If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.](#)" I suspect that some who don't walk in fellowship attempt to justify their friendships as evidence of walking in the light, but any such attempts probably reveal that they don't understand or have experienced true fellowship. 1 John teaches that walking in fellowship is dependent upon walking in the light and having an abiding relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is very important for every individual to evaluate their religious activities and especially their motives. It is very good to desire to accomplish great things for God, if the motives are a natural outflow of walking in the light, but potentially very serious if the motives are for self-gain even to earn God's approval.

Individuals can accomplish great things with determination and self-discipline, but if they walk in darkness, the more spectacular the accomplishments, the greater their pride. And regardless of how impressive they may appear, such accomplishments are counterfeit (Matthew 7:21-23). Therefore, all Pastors, leaders, and Christians are challenged to carefully evaluate if they truly walk in the light, abide with the Lord Jesus Christ, and if they truly walk in fellowship with Believers.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts**, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is **earthly, unspiritual, demonic**. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

### **Fellow Brothers and Sisters:**

Until someone experiences true fellowship, it is difficult to define or explain what fellowship is. Therefore, some brief descriptions of those who walked in fellowship with us may be helpful (not in any specific order).

Mr. B truly walked in the light with the Lord Jesus Christ. He consistently memorized and meditated on God's Word. He rose early every morning to present devotions with his children before He went to work. Fellowship with Mr. B was a joy. However, God allowed him to be stricken with a debilitating disease and his physical abilities continued to decline for over two decades. For many of those years, he was bound to a wheelchair. As his illness progressed, he was fed through a feeding tube. In the end, he could barely talk, but he often whispered prayers with visitors. Even after more than 2 decades of suffering, Mr. B never lost his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, he never complained or was bitter at God. All who knew Mr. B knows that he truly walked in the light.

Despite the short time we had together some of the closest fellowship that I had was with Mr. J. Quickly after meeting Mr. J we were like long-lost brothers. Mr. J wanted to emphasize the importance of marriage for his children so he and his family drove several hours to give a surprise anniversary party for another dear family. After the party, as Mr. J was cleaning up, he suffered a massive heart attack. His wife and children said goodbye as he went to be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mr. B and Mr. J often said and were confident that "God is Sovereign". They both trusted that God was in control and that His ways were higher than our ways. When Mr. J went to be with the Lord, I wasn't happy and I told God, "Don't you know that we are short of Godly men down here?" Of all of the men that God should have used to accomplish great things for His Kingdom, in my perspective, it should have been these two men. I had to ask God for forgiveness, acknowledge His Sovereignty, His wisdom, and I was forced to consider several questions. Especially, "What does God want from His Children?" (Note: Part of the motive for this discussion).

Then there was Mr. M, who grew up on a farm, was very practical, and had a fantastic knowledge of the Bible, Biblical philosophies, and principles. Mr. M decided that he had made enough money in his career so he retired early with plans to go on the mission field. However, before he finished his required training, he had a massive heart attack. He recovered and lived about 10 more years. During those years, when his health improved and he continued to pursue missions but God stopped him with more physical challenges. God had different plans about how Mr. M could accomplish great things for His Kingdom and he recently went to be with the Lord. Mr. M had fantastic insights, desires to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, and he had a

close walk with Him. I so appreciated the time of our fellowship together and the long discussions of Biblical doctrines, philosophies, and applications.

Despite the poor track record of many pastors, there have been fantastic fellowship with a few. Pastor D was a great pastor in every respect and he was faithful to live by Biblical principles. He embraced a Biblical conviction that he would not remarry divorced individuals, even under the threat of being fired. After being fired, he worked diligently to start a new Church but God directed him away from full-time ministry. Pastor D continued to share the Gospel, disciple young Believers, and lead home Bible studies for decades. During the last few years of his life, our situation allowed me to have in-depth conversations with Pastor D every week. We discussed so many Biblical issues and truths but the true value of our time together was the fellowship.

Another fellow Believer was Dr. D. I didn't have much opportunity to know him before he went to be with the Lord but I have had great fellowship with several he influenced—some of his children, some of his grandchildren, and his Timothy. The reflection of Dr. D's life is that he walked humbly before God and many came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because he so effectively demonstrated God's unconditional love. Many years ago, God prompted him with the question, "Why are we sharing the Gospel with those who have heard it before". So, he jumped on a plane and flew to India. He continued his medical practice in the States but flew back and forth to India many times for over 40 years. He shared the Gospel but then emphasized the importance of discipleship. As disciples matured, they were motivated to be disciple-makers which created a ripple effect across India. A reasonable estimate is that discipleship ministry is pushing 10 million. Through the multiplication of discipleship, it is estimated that God used Dr. D's efforts to share the Gospel with over 100 million individuals. When first hearing about some of the spectacular claims, inquiries were made to verify if they were true. It was found that most of the Believers had received Christ under severe threats and had suffered severe persecution. The report came back, "They are the real deal". Dr. D did accomplish great things for God's Kingdom but all who knew him testify that he was motivated by God's love but he had no desire to be recognized. As greatly as God used Dr. D, he is virtually unknown within the modern American Church. Unlike most renowned Christian leaders, very little can be found about Dr. D on the internet.

It is impossible to adequately describe the relationships that each of these men had with God. Their fellowship, abiding friendships with God, and their love are clear evidence that they walk in the light. It has been a delight and a joy to know and walk in fellowship with each of them, and in Dr. D's case with those he discipled.

#### **Qualities of those who walk in the light:**

Some friendships develop quickly and become strong because of similar interests, ideas, and goals. But the driving force of fellowship is Believers walking together with the Lord Jesus Christ. I have come to believe that friendships are based on Philio relationships, which is why non-Christians can be good friends and have successful marriages. But fellowship is based on self-sacrificing Agape love. Depending on time and opportunities, friendships may develop among those who walk in fellowship, but the foundation is brother/sister type relationships. This should be no surprise for fellow members of the family of the Lord Jesus Christ.



One observation is that successful marriages are built on Philio love (friendships) but great marriages are the result of spouses walking together in the light. The key to building great marriages is for both spouses to strengthen their relationship with and abide with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another observation is that friendships tend to be exclusive (2 is company but 3 is a crowd), often forming cliques (sometimes unintentionally), but fellowship is by nature, inclusive.

It is worth noting that God holds hospitality as a qualification for Church leaders. But even as easy as it is to **fake** hospitality, most Christians and Church leaders that we have known have failed to show hospitality, while those who walk in fellowship have consistently demonstrated gracious hospitality. My conclusion is that genuine hospitality is a reflection of the love that Believers have with God.

Another observation is that those who do not walk in fellowship are usually very reluctant to **accept** hospitality.

Another common characteristic of those who walk in fellowship is the importance of God's Word. Because they are embraced by God's love, they have the power and desire to walk with and sincerely respect the Lord Jesus Christ. Their understanding of His character, His heart, and His power gives them sincere fear of the Lord. Thus, they embrace the authority and the accuracy of His Word. Therefore, fellowship is commonly centered around in-depth discussions of Biblical truths and principles. There are differences of opinion around minor issues and applications of the Scriptures but within solid frameworks of Biblical truths, there is harmony and respect, sometimes involving personal challenges. It is impossible to adequately describe the relationships that I have with those with whom there has been fellowship, and the delight, and the joy it has been.

It is important to note that none who walk in fellowship claim perfection and some have fallen into sin. However, they confessed, repented, and rushed back to God. While not perfect, the essence of their lives is “**first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.**”

Thankfully there were many years of attending Church where we found fellowship and communities. The years without community were very dry and tedious but **the years with community were extremely valuable and countless hours of discussion provided tremendous insights into understanding God and His Word.** I believe that one of God's great delights is when fellow Believers walk in the light with Him in communities, and that fellowship-based communities are very powerful.

### **The Need for Transformed Hearts:**

Many legitimate Church leaders strive to guide and encourage individuals to spiritual maturity and yet moral failures and unopposed open sin within the Church continue to run rampant. Most Christians claim to have relationships with God but so few demonstrate the fruit of genuine love, hospitality, or fellowship. Sadly, many proclaim their righteousness but embrace and promote carnal worldviews. Some will no doubt reject my observations and conclusions but who can disagree that the paramount need for the modern Church is to dramatically raise the spiritual maturity of Christians?

There have been so many programs over the years, and some have had positive effects, but overall, there has been much failure. While many programs have been labeled “discipleship”, very few have been grounded on one-on-one discipleship relationships. The Lord Jesus Christ specifically ordained Believers with the authority and responsibilities to guide and encourage individuals to spiritual maturity through discipleship (Matthew 28:18-20). But He and the Apostle Paul both set examples of intensive one-on-one mentor relationships, which have seldom been followed.

Furthermore, the goals of discipleship and other programs that I have been aware of have not effectively transformed hearts through the deeper truths of the Gospel. God’s love is often included in the presentation of the Gospel. I responded to His love when I asked Jesus into my heart but I had very little understanding of the extent of God’s love. But when He revealed His perfect love, it became the source of the desire and power to love and honor Him. The power of His love is guiding me down narrow paths to transform my heart through other deep truths of the Gospel.

It appears that the major difference between those who walk in fellowship and those who don’t is the degree to which their hearts have been transformed. Therefore, it is proposed that effective one-on-one discipleship must focus on integrating at least the Biblical truths listed below:

1. To understand God’s unconditional love. To be embraced by God’s unconditional love.
2. To be motivated by God’s love to surrender and bow to Jesus Christ as Lord.
3. To die to self, demonstrated by moral purity, service to others, and developing Godly Character. To be humble to memorize, review, and meditate on the Scriptures.
4. To develop a personal relationship and a constant awareness with the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. To understand our identity in the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. To respect God (the fear of the Lord), to embrace His Word as truth with absolute authority. To seek to know God’s heart and to strive to develop wisdom.
7. To transform our minds, develop Biblical values, and maintain Biblical convictions.

Discipleship is a life-long journey, and the measure of effective discipleship is when Believers respond to God, their hearts are transformed (Galatians 2:20), they abide in Christ, walk in the light, walk in fellowship (1 John 1:5), and reflect God’s love.

These are significant challenges and to help integrate them, [All Honor to the King- Discipleship](#) discusses the importance of developing sincere faith, a pure heart, and a clear conscience (1 Timothy 1:5). The [Discipleship Meditation System \(DMS\) A Handbook for Mentors](#) provides tools and scripture verses to memorize, review, and meditate on to empower Believers to die to self, bow to Jesus Christ as Lord, and serve God and others with pure motives. The handbook is designed for family discipleship but is applicable for mentoring adults.

Comment: If an individual is born again, God will complete the work that He starts (Philippians 1:6). However, because of the deceitfulness of the heart, challenges to transform hearts and minds are difficult, and many sins may be encountered. Therefore, effective discipleship is critical.

## **The Challenge of Effective Discipleship:**

The above goals are not new and are probably commonly held by many Church leaders. However, not all discipleship efforts have been effective. Many leaders embrace the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16), and the power of God's Word (Hebrews 4:12), but hold philosophies that discipleship can be accomplished by simply presenting/ teaching Biblical truths. While such efforts are admirable, the natural heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), so if discipleship efforts are limited to intellectual instructions, for most, it takes a very long time and many failures (sins) before the truths of the Gospel transform hearts.

Therefore, it is proposed that to successfully integrate the truths above, discipleship must be accomplished through deeper one-on-one relationships, as was modeled by both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.

Close personal interactions are necessary because Believers must be willing to be guided to die to self, to be humble, to memorize, review, meditate, and obey God's Word. Sermons, classes, or legalistic checklists may be useful but without one-on-one discipleship, the time to obtain spiritual maturity for most is usually manyfold. And until there are deeper transformations it is much easier for sins to creep in.

Close personal relationships are also necessary to accurately discern and address if there is true transformation, if **and why** Jesus Christ is Lord, and if there is genuine love towards others (Philippians 2:20). An excellent example of one-on-one discipleship is how the Lord Jesus Christ mentored Peter to transform his heart.

During college, God guided me to receive intensive discipleship training. That program was very helpful, and there were one-on-one designated mentors. However, some of the relationships were not as close as they needed to be. To the degree that the challenges above were accomplished, especially an abiding relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, fellow Believers flourished. But to the degree that the transformations were not accomplished, or until they were, there were struggles and failures.

Effective discipleship requires time, energy, love, discipline, and one-on-one attention, all of which are often difficult to accomplish with adults. However, God's design of the family is the perfect discipleship environment. There have been some bright spots but sadly, much of the modern Church has failed to encourage fathers/ parents to properly raise (disciple) the children that God has placed under their responsibility. Instead of guiding children to love and have an abiding relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the training (discipleship) of many has been delegated to others. John Dewey and his cronies clearly stated their goals of progressive education **to remove all traces of Biblical Christianity from American culture**. Their motives are revealed in their [Humanist Manifesto, appendix B, Challenges to Disciple Children](#). More important is the evidence that so many children from Christian homes reject the Lord Jesus Christ. When they failed to grasp God's love, they did not receive the power or the desire to honor Him. Encouraged to pursue sin, driven by guilt and bitterness, many have become outspoken enemies of God. The Church must return to embracing the priority of encouraging, guiding, and equipping fathers/ parents to effectively disciple their children.

In addition to raising Godly young adults, a great advantage of family discipleship is that when parents take their responsibilities seriously, leading by example, they usually experience greater spiritual maturity. A side benefit is that family discipleship does not allow time for mid-life crises.

Also, it is very concerning that many generations of progressive education have been allowed to so harden the hearts, values, and world views of students that it is very difficult for many in our nation to even consider the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not clear why much of the modern Church abandoned one-on-one discipleship or why family discipleship has been so widely rejected, but it is vital that both must become high priorities. [Challenges to Disciple Children](#) presents 7 challenges to warn and help fathers/ parents to protect and prepare their children, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

### **Recommendations:**

Who was I but a grungy, mean little kid whom the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself and built a close friendship with? But by the time I was 30, I had seen so many children from Christian homes reject their faith. And the faith of so many adults dashed against the rocks. And many Christians and Christian leaders who clad themselves with spiritual facades, but with little evidence of abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ or walking in fellowship. Sadly, my experiences are consistent with the increasing moral and spiritual failures in the modern American Church, which are also reflected in American culture.

Few Church leaders accept responsibility for many of the failures within the Church. This is probably because success has been generally defined to allow the appearance of success. However, the Lord Jesus Christ gives stern warnings about how success should be defined (Matthew 7:21-23). True spiritual success is when Believers abide in the Lord Jesus Christ, walk in the light, and walk in fellowship.

Thankfully, there is a portion of the Church who walk humbly with the Lord Jesus Christ. God has maintained a valuable remnant, and there are some signs of repentance, but the quality of spiritual maturity across our nation must be addressed. Therefore, Christians, Pastors, and Church leaders must repent, call for repentance, and embrace the challenges to transform hearts through the deep truths of the Gospel through effective discipleship (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is proposed that effective discipleship must follow the Lord Jesus Christ's example of intensive one-on-one relationships. If the challenge is embraced to guide and encourage Believers to abide in Christ, walk in the light, and walk in fellowship, it is further proposed that senior pastors, on down, must lead by example, abandon their bubbles, and personally disciple appropriate individuals. Not just to make disciples but disciple-makers (2 Timothy 2:2). Furthermore, it is also vital to engage God's powerful provision of family discipleship so that Fathers/ parents effectively prepare, disciple, and train their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

God is not a respecter of any so it is no surprise that He is allowing tremendous judgment over America and the Church. Thankfully, God is merciful and loving, and with sincere repentance, increasing numbers of Believers will walk in the light, communities of Believers will grow, and the culture of the modern Church will be transformed. If the modern Church repents and embraces these challenges, the Church will once again become a beacon of love and light, not only to our nation but to the World. (See Appendix A)

## **Appendix A, the power of intensive one-on-one discipleship:**

If 10,000 Church leaders, a relatively small percentage of the evangelical Bible-teaching Church, embraced the challenge of one-on-one Discipleship, the power of the Gospel would be greatly multiplied. It is also important for an average of 10 families per church to begin intensive family discipleship.

The first few groups of men to be discipled would probably already have solid relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ, but after a year of discipleship training, there would be about 20,000 disciple-makers. If these men continue the discipleship process, at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> year, there could be at least 80,000 disciple-makers with abiding relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ. The number of discipled women could be similar.

After the first 4 years, the initial spiritual quality of men would probably be less so a reasonable discipleship time could be about 2 years. If discipleship continued to double every two years, at the end of 20 years, (one generation) the total number of men who walked in the light would be about 20,000,000. If the number of women is about the same there would be about 40,000,000 Disciple-makers.

At the same time, if an average of 10 sets of parents per Church began family discipleship, given an average of 3 children, because the children are younger, a reasonable discipleship process of 4 years would result in 500,000 Disciple-makers. If this process continued to double every 4 years, after 20 years, there would be an additional 8,000,000 disciple-makers.

These would not just be Christians but men, women, and young adults who had close abiding relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ. The impact of the Gospel on our nation and the world would be beyond most imaginations.

Furthermore, the result of effective family discipleship would be about 2.5 million young adults who would become the leaders of the next generation and for many to follow. The impact of the community of Believers would drastically transform the culture of the Church, our nation, and the world.

There are several assumptions in this analysis, but the potential impact of intensive one-on-one discipleship should never be underestimated.