

# All honor to the King- Discipleship

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## Introduction:

The Lord Jesus Christ revealed His love to me when I was about 6 years old. There were several deficits in my life but God began building a friendship with me. When God entered my life, I had zero Bible knowledge and nothing about anything. However, God's law is written on our hearts, and as my relationship with God and my Bible knowledge grew there has been a long string of questions. Some of the questions and motivations for this project can be found in Appendix D.

In addition to the death and destruction of sin, most such situations bring shame to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the goal of this paper to point out failures, or even to answer some of the questions but to propose effective Biblical solutions, to honor Him.

A comment worth noting is that as new insights and conclusions became apparent, I lamented that we were not aware of them when we were raising our, now-adult children. Hopefully, they will implement these insights with children.

Prayerfully, as these principles are applied, they will help the modern American Church to bring honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mankind's problems, both within and outside of the Church, are the results of being gripped with the lust-of-the-eyes, the lust-of-the-flesh, and the pride-of-life (1 John 2:16). These qualities produce powerful temptations, promoting selfishness.

When God reveals Himself to an individual they must crucify their pride-of-life so that Jesus Christ can be placed on the throne of their lives. Then when God's Spirit enters and regenerates them, they are born again.

However, being born again does not destroy their pride-of-life, creating tremendous internal struggles. Without effective mentoring, God continues to perfect His Children but at the expense of considerable time. Therefore, God has commissioned discipleship to help Believers implement the power and the desire to sacrifice their pride-of-life, become living sacrifices, worship God, and demonstrate love to God and others.

It is further proposed that there are three critical elements of discipleship, sincere faith, a pure heart, and a clear conscience. As will be discussed, these elements create a solid foundation for genuine love.

The ultimate goals of discipleship are a transformed life, confidence in their salvation, an abiding friendship with God, and love.

## **Section 1, Foundations of Sin:**

1 John 2:15,16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

The exact definitions of the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride-of-life are not specifically defined in the Scripture and there is little contextual information. After consideration, the following definitions are presented.

Based on the meaning of the specific words, the Lusts-of-the-flesh is craving the fulfillment of selfish wants and desires. Lusts-of-the-flesh is often sexual and includes all types of addictions.

The lust-of-the-eyes strongly implies covetousness, greed, the love of money, and desires to be praised by man.

The pride-of-life is self-dependency, demonstrating arrogance, pride in self, and boasting but the ultimate expression is for individuals to be their own authority. If the pride-of-life is not restrained or tempered, individuals will usurp God's authority, even to the point of declaring what is good and evil. If it is unrestrained, pride-of-life will produce lust for power, even over the life and death of others.

It is also proposed that the pride-of-life, demanding God's authority, is the root of the lust-of-the-eyes and the lust-of-the-flesh.

While there is some conjecture in the definition of the pride-of-life, evidence is demonstrated throughout God's Word

### **References of the Pride-Of-Life:**

Eve was confronted with and failed all three of these areas of temptation in the garden. It is significant that her driving desire was to be like God, "knowing" good and evil, clearly an expression of her pride-of-life. The pride-of-life was no doubt a significant element when Cain slew Able. Why Pharaoh refused to let the Children of Israel leave Egypt. Why King Saul disobeyed God and felt threatened by David. Pride-of-life motivated King Nebuchadnezzar to build a statue for himself and throw Daniel into the lion's den. These and many other examples of the pride-of-life are woven through the scriptures.

It is harder for those with riches to enter into God's Kingdom. The love of money or the lust-of-the-eyes is the root of all evil. Outward beauty, talent, academic achievement, and fame, may all be expressed as the lust-of-the-eyes and the lust-of-the-flesh but they are built on the foundation to promote and enable the pride-of-life.

A significant example of the pride-of-life was the Pharisees. Being Old Testament scholars, there was no excuse for them to not recognize all of the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. They knew the Scriptures but there are significant differences between understanding with the heart and the mind.

Clinging to their pride-of-life they rejected Him and were willing to insult God by putting the Son of God to death on the cross. (Refer to the parable of the vineyard, Matthew 21:33.)

Throughout history, the driving force behind most Pharaohs, kings, religious leaders, and modern Civil leaders was/is their desire to claim and exercise absolute authority. Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Mao Tse Tung, and many others were all driven by their pride-of-life. Usurping the power of life and death from God, they murdered millions of innocent people to maintain their positions of authority. Their pride-of-life and lust for power drove them to attempt to establish absolute control.

It has been said, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". The American Founding Fathers understood the powerful temptations of the pride-of-life. Therefore, they designed a system of Government to help restrain individuals from fulfilling their wicked desires.

Sadly, there are Americas who claim to be Christians who desire and/or support those who are striving to tear down American culture, dismantle the Constitution, and ultimately destroy all vestiges of Biblical principles. Striving to throw off all restraints, they do not understand that they are controlled by their pride-of-life (Proverbs 2:14).

**The root of sin-** The fool says, "there is no God", following the desires of Eve, they foolishly proclaim themselves to be God. Usurping God's authority, redefining right and wrong, they are unaware that they are slaves to their pride-of-life (Psalms 14:1).

The Ten Commandments reveal that the pride-of-life is the foundation of all sin:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not serve idols.
3. Do not take God's name in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness.
10. Do not Covet.

When someone yields to their pride-of-life, placing themselves above God, they knowingly or unwittingly break commandments 1, 2, 3. Not respecting God's law, such as the Sabbath (#4), they claim to be above God's authority. Rebellion against God's given authority, parents (#5) is a logical progression to fulfill the lusts of the pride-of-life. Further digression is the desire to gain control over others through murder (#6), sexual sins (#7), stealing (#8), and lying (#9). #7, #8, #9, and #10 are *expressions* of lust-of-the-eyes and lust-of-the-flesh but they rest on the foundation of the pride-of-life.

Romans 1 describes rebellion. When God restrains the fulfillment of the pride-of-life, the natural tendency is anger, bitterness, and hatred of God (verses 21-22). Further digression is embracing worldly

values (the-lust-of-the-eyes- verse 23). Sinking further into sin and death is the fulfillment of self-centered passions and degrading desires (verses 24-32). The lust-of-the-eyes and the lust-of-the-flesh are significant and their roots are the pride-of-life.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ's example:**

The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God, but He was also fully man, who also needed to crucify His pride-of-life.

**Philippians 2:3-8 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

When the Lord Jesus Christ was being judged by Pontious Pilot He could have yielded to His pride-of-life, causing His bindings to fall off, to be instantly healed, and call a legion of angels to rise and annihilate His enemies. However, He obeyed the will of the Father, even to death on the cross. His humanity did not make Him immune to the pride-of-life as was demonstrated by His agonizing prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Motivated by genuine love and obedience to the Father, allowing Himself to be sacrificed for mankind demonstrated His love and also His willingness to crucify His pride-of-life.

### **Implications for the Gospel:**

Therefore, because pride-of-life is such a powerful force of sin it is important to recognize and address it. Possibly the most important impact of the pride-of-life is how individuals respond to the Gospel. The Scriptures are clear that the natural man is dead in their trespasses and sins and it is impossible for them to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ on their own. Only when God enlightens their hearts, giving them the power and desire, are they able to resist their pride-of-life, humbly confess their sins, and bow to make Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives (Romans 10:9,10). But the natural man resists every one of these elements of the Gospel because of their pride-of-life.

Most individuals reject the Lord Jesus Christ because they desperately cling to their pride-of-life, not because of intellectual disagreements. Therefore, when sharing the Gospel, care must be taken to not appeal to an individual's pride-of-life but to challenge them to humbly bow before God. Who would not want to accept a free gift and God's acceptance? Sadly, many individuals have become "Christians" without crucifying their pride-of-life. They pray to receive Christ but either they don't understand, are never challenged, or they secretly refuse to give up control of their life.

Thankfully, God knows the heart and in some cases, continues to bring them to where they submit to Jesus Christ as their Lord. Those who cling to their pride-of-life, intellectually and possibly emotionally believe that they are "Christians". Their pride-of-life and lust of the eyes motivate them to desire the acceptance of God and men so they often accumulate academic credentials, religious accomplishments,

and positions of authority within the Church. However, God is only concerned with who they are, not what they have accomplished. Without the Spirit of God in their hearts they are only “religious”.

These statements may seem judgmental but so many Christians have drifted away for God? How many leaders, with decades of accomplishments, have later openly turned to mock the Lord Jesus Christ? All Believers can fall into sin but the difference is that those who are born again will later respond to God, repent, and return to Him. Sadly, there have been too many who clung to their pride-of-life, refusing to repent even after 20, 30, and 40 years. These are not intellectual or even emotional issues so refusing to return to God after so many decades raise the question if they were ever born again. These two types of individuals are described in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 7:21-23).

All believers must battle with their pride-of-life. Those who openly fall into sin and refuse to repent raise tremendous concerns. How many renowned Christian leaders, seduced by the power of their positions of authority secretly cling to their pride-of-life?

Sins driven by the lust-of-the-flesh are easily identified and usually shouted from the rooftops. Sins of the lust-of-the-eyes (selfishness, covetousness, and embracing non-Biblical values) are not as easily recognized. Sadly, sins of the pride-of-life are often not recognized, sometimes flaunted, and even praised. It is very good to be “on fire for the Lord” or to desire to accomplish great things for God’s Kingdom but only if the motivation for these goals is love for God and others. Those who strive to accomplish great things for God but do not love others, especially fellow Believers are only serving their pride-of-life. Therefore, if any says that they love God but don’t love their brother they are liars.

Recognizing and addressing pride-of-life is critical for sharing the Gospel, discipleship, and proper raising of children. It is proposed that the beginning of discipleship is to challenge Believers to publicly crucify their pride-of-life in baptism. The symbolism of rising out of the water to a new life must be an assertion of dying to pride-of-life (to sin), making Jesus Christ their Lord. Such words are often said during baptisms but how many understand the implications of what they are proclaiming?

After baptism, a key goal of discipleship must be to crucify the pride-of-life

## **Section 2, God’s provision for conquering the pride-of-life:**

Lust-of-the-eyes, lust-of-the-flesh, and pride-of-life are intimately interrelated and are powerful elements of the sinful nature of the heart. God has provided at least 4 solutions to effectively address these temptations, especially the pride-of-life.

**Solution One-** The book of Proverbs includes many discussions of the pride-of-life, including, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” It is proposed that stable, loving families, that apply appropriate discipline effectively temper the pride-of-life in children. This truth is effective for both Christian and non-Christian families. It is worth noting that a major movement over the last 50 years has been to discourage proper Biblical child discipline.

James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

**Solution Two-** When situations are out of one's control, the limitations of pride-of-life become obvious. Therefore, God allows trials of life to encourage and motivate individuals to not bow to or trust their own abilities, or their positions of authority. Pride-of-life is tempered when individuals must rely on God and others.

Proverbs 30:8,9 **Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.**

The greatest challenge of pride-of-life is for individuals to speak truth in their hearts, that they are not greater than God. Riches and affluence carry tremendous temptations of pride-of-life. "Who is the Lord?" is a statement of the pride-of-life. It has been said that success can be more destructive for individuals than failure.

Note: Troubled marriages indicate that one or both spouses are yielding to their pride-of-life, often resulting in bitterness, hatred, jealousy, and revenge. However, God allows the struggles of failed marriages to encourage the spouses to crucify their pride-of-life. Instead of bitterness, hatred, jealousy, and revenge, the proper response should be thankfulness and sincere love. This is much easier said than done, which makes discipleship so important for helping spouses to crucify their pride-of-life and make Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives.

**Solution Three-** When someone is born again, Believers have the Holy Spirit and are regenerated but God does not supernaturally remove their pride-of-life. When Believers resist powerful temptations and obey God, such acts are demonstrations of love and spiritual maturity. Responding to God's promptings, spending time with Him in prayer, and embracing His commands are all demonstrations of love towards Him. However, because the heart is so self-centered (pride-of-life), God has commissioned one-on-one discipleship to help Believers conquer their pride-of-life.

Note: Classes on discipleship and "shortcuts" will produce results but the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul modeled discipleship to be one-on-one.

**Solution Four-** The most effective approach to conquer pride-of-life is for fathers (parents) to properly and lovingly discipline *and* disciple their children (solutions #2 and #3 combined). The great advantage of family discipleship is that as children grow into adulthood many sins and encumbrances can be avoided.

An important warning for parents is that outward obedience (accomplishments) should never be confused with the relationship that children have with the Lord Jesus Christ. One evidence of children who have not conquered their pride-of-life is how they treat their siblings. Constant squabbling, rivalries, and jealousies are symptoms that they need mentoring to help them conquer their pride-of-life.

See Appendix A for a discussion on God's purpose for family discipleship.

### Section 3, Effective Discipleship:

As mentioned, the first principle of Biblical discipleship is one-on-one relationships. Paul's statement, "I have you in my heart" reveals that the time he spent mentoring them in one-on-one relationships resulted in deep concern and love for them. A similar love that parents naturally have for their children.

Other principles for discipleship are described in 1 Timothy 1:5:

*1 Timothy 1:5 "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a clear conscience and a sincere faith"*

Paul gives Timothy a concise definition of the goal of instruction, including teaching and discipleship. Paul used these principles in many of the letters he wrote to the Churches. It is important to note that discipleship may involve many activities, the ultimate goal must be genuine love built on three significant foundations, "a pure heart", "a clear conscience", and "a sincere faith".

#### - Sincere faith:

The foundation of sincere faith is being born again with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, an early stage in discipleship is to help individuals verify within their hearts that they are only trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. Reliance on anything else reveals that they are continuing to depend on pride-of-life instead of embracing God's unconditional love by faith.

*Romans 10:9,10 if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

Some believe that "confessing" only implies making a statement, but an important element of salvation is to submit to Jesus Christ to be Lord.

*Luke 9:23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

After salvation, it is necessary to continue to sacrifice one's selfish desires (the pride-of-life), daily, hourly, and even moment-by-moment (take up His Cross daily). Believers have different weaknesses so mentors need to challenge disciples-in-training to die to their lust-of-the-eyes, their lust-of-the-flesh, and their pride-of-life. A major goal of discipleship is to help Believers have victory over temptation, not through their own determination (their pride-of-life) but through submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some examples of areas to crucify to God:

Pride of life:

- Serve, forgive, and love others (Philippians 2:20,21).
- Submit to appropriate authorities, parents, etc.

- Sacrifice lusts for power and control.
- Disciplined life, putting away laziness and greed.
- Rightly know and handle truth.
- Bow to God's Word as the ultimate source of truth.
- Submit time and money (giving, sabbath) to God.
- Integrity, honesty, and truthfulness.
- Scripture memory, review, and meditation.
- To be faithful Representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ (Prophet, Priest, and King).

Lust of the eyes:

- Crucify desires of appearances and reputations.
- Share the Gospel.

Lust of the flesh:

- Humbly embrace the Righteous of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Personal purity (Proverbs 4:23).
- Proper diet, exercise, fasting.
- Sacrifice self-indulgent appetites, Drugs, alcohol, and lifestyles.

After taking up His Cross daily, understanding their identities in the Lord Jesus Christ greatly helps Believers have sincere faith. As they begin to realize the holiness and glory of God, how low their nature is, and the tremendous price that God made for them, Believers begin to be gripped by God's love. Initially, Believers usually must embrace God's love by faith but as they understand their identities, God's love grips them. Believers who are gripped by God's love possess tremendous transforming power.

It is significant to note the past tense of the terms in the passage below.

**Ephesians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**

Receiving every spiritual blessing, being chosen, and being adopted as sons of God are of tremendous value but being loved by God is priceless.

**Ephesians 1:7-10 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.**



God is Holy, requiring Believers to be covered with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ for them to have a relationship with Him. These statements, “Redemption through His Blood”, “forgiveness of our trespasses”, and “according to the riches of His grace”, all affirm that believers are covered with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, God views Believers with the same righteousness that He views the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Ephesians 1:11-12 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.**

Believers receive an incorruptible inheritance. Part of this inheritance is becoming Prince and Princesses of the Creator God of the Universe. It is God’s purpose to transform Believers into Jesus Christ’s image by allowing trials and struggles into their lives, to crucify their pride-of-life for them to develop His character.

It is important to remember that God causes all things to work together for the good of His Children. And to remember that the short-term challenges of this life are inconsequential compared to the relationships that His Children have with Him for eternity.

The close relationships within marriage reveal challenges that are designed by God to help Believers identify and address pride-of-life issues. Therefore, marriage struggles are very valuable for discipleship. See Appendix C for a further discussion on marriage.

**Ephesians 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.**

The Gospel is important because the first step in a relationship with God is salvation. However, having a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of the Universe is no small thing. Many appear to jump to the assumption that just being born again and having the Holy Spirit enter into their being, performing religious and ritual activities, prayer, and reading the Bible, automatically results in a personal friendship with God. All Believers must embrace God’s love by faith, and then build a friendship with Him until they are gripped by His love.

A major challenge in helping a Believer to develop a sincere faith is to discern if the motives are to honor and glorify God or if they are to honor and glorify themselves (the pride-of-life). It is always easy to claim proper motives but all desires to gain recognition from men are pride-of-life and lust-of-the-eyes. Therefore, the only appropriate motive for self-discipline and even self-restraint are expressions of love for God. With the correct motive several activities are very profitable:

1. Spending time in prayer and God’s Word.
2. Developing and sharing personal testimonies of God’s love and How He has transformed Believers.

### 3. Memorizing, meditating, and reviewing passages of scripture.

Therefore, the key goals of discipleship are to guide Believers to develop Sincere Faith by challenging them to crucify their pride-of-life and to embrace God's love.

#### **-Pure Heart:**

As previously mentioned, when Believers are born again, the Holy Spirit enters into and regenerates their hearts, but God does not supernaturally remove their pride-of-life. With a regenerated spirit and lower nature (especially the pride-of-life) both residing within Believers, there is the potential for tremendous conflicts. The pride-of-life is selfishness while the new spirit desires genuine love.

God allows this conflict because when Believers sacrifice their desires at tremendous personal costs, with proper attitudes, such sacrifices are expressions of love to God. Additionally, when Believers "sacrifice" their selfish wants and desires, they become living sacrifices.

**Rom 12:1,2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

God values the living sacrifices of Believers as true worship.

When Believers die to themselves, making Jesus Christ Lord, being living sacrifices, their friendship with God strengthens. Thus, a measure of effective discipleship is when Believers develop a strong friendship with God. Spending time in prayer and His Word cannot just be a task but there must be communion with God. As Believers talk with God, ask questions, make requests, expressing appreciation for His love, two-way conversations are formed when God responds by prompting them with insights into His Word, various thoughts, ideas, and challenges. When these conversations grow into a constant awareness of God's presence, an abiding friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ is formed. Encouraging Believers to "Abide in Christ" is a primary goal for developing a pure heart.

Believers who abide in Christ, when they experience wrong thoughts and temptations, they are not alone in the dark. When God is present and there are temptations, He usually doesn't need to say anything. But because of the lust-of-the-eyes, the lust-of-the-flesh, and the pride-of-life, Believers may sometime dwell on temptations. In many cases all God needs to do is remind the Believer of His presence. Abiding in Christ does not make Believers perfect, but it becomes natural for them to recognize and resist temptations. When there is sin, God is pleased when they quickly repent and claim His forgiveness as described in 1 John 1:9.

An abiding relationship is a foundation for a pure heart. A practice that has been helpful for me is described in Appendix E.

Sadly, sometimes even abiding Believers ignore God's promptings and fall into sin. God continues to call them back to Himself. Regardless of how long it takes, when they confess and repent, God is faithful to

forgive them. There may be consequences for their sins but God's forgiveness enlightens their understanding of His love. The contrast between God's holiness and mercy, their failures, and His forgiveness, provides an understanding of the magnificence of God's unconditional love. As they further grasp the surpassing excellence of their identities, especially how God views them as righteous through the Lordship of Jesus Christ, even their failures help them be embraced by God's love. Thus, building friendships with God, maintaining an abiding relationship, keeping short accounts of temptations, and embracing God's love are all important elements of discipleship.

The greater that Believers are gripped by God's love (the result of sincere faith), the stronger their abiding friendships with Christ (resulting in a pure heart) the more power that they have to crucify their pride-of-life. A pure heart constantly submits to Jesus Christ as Lord, energizing Believers to serve, obey, reflect love to Him, and love others.

#### **-Clear Conscience:**

When Believers respond to the Gospel, dying to pride-of-life, making Jesus Christ Lord, the foundation of a clear conscience is formed. Then as Believers abide with Christ, their pure hearts produce the power and desire to maintain a clear conscience.

Because of the deceitfulness of the heart, many redefine good to be evil and evil to be good. Therefore, an important element of developing a clear conscience is a solid grasp of the truths of God's Word. However, knowledge puffs up and feeds the pride-of-life so all Biblical knowledge must be approached with sincere faith and a pure heart to produce:

1. To know God and His character.
2. To develop a renewed mind.
3. The ability to discern truth.

[Heb 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.](#)

4. To develop a Biblically-based value system.

As these truths saturate the hearts of Believers, they develop sincere respect for God (the fear of the Lord) and delight in His laws and standards.

[Psalms 1:1,2 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.](#)

Obedience through discipline alone is burdensome, feeds the pride-of-life, and only changes outward appearances (such as the Pharisees). However, obedience motivated by love and abiding with the Lord Jesus Christ generates respect for God's Word and His standards

[John 15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.](#)

John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

When the foundational truths of sincere faith, a pure heart, and a clear conscience are integrated into the life of Believers, they develop Godly character (Christlikeness). And Godly character leads to opportunities to overcome evil with Good (Romans12:21) and to be salt and light.

Doing right and avoiding what is wrong yield a clear conscience and are the results of effective discipleship.

**Love from a clear conscience, a pure heart, and sincere faith:**

The pride-of-life, a root of sin, often motivates individuals to strive for accomplishments that give them the appearance of being acceptable to God and respected by man. Given the heart of the natural man is so deceitful and desperately wicked it is possible for “Christians” to have tremendous accomplishments and yet they may not even be born again. Therefore, it is critical that every Christian accurately evaluate their relationship with God. Thus, the Apostle John provided attributes to allow Believers to have confidence that they have eternal life.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have eternal life.**

Walking in the light is the first evidence.

1 John 1:6,7 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.**

Some no doubt falsely claim to walk in the light and have fellowship with God, However, those who do not practice the truth do not have significant evidence of genuine fellowship with Believers. Friendship is promoted as counterfeit fellowship.

Several characteristics of friendships are similar to fellowship but friendship and fellowship are not equal. Solid friendships are created on good character qualities, such as faithfulness, dependability, loyalty, etc. These qualities should also be reflected in fellowship but fellowship forms brother/ sister relationships. Surprisingly, many non-Believers have high levels of integrity and often have stronger friendships than Believers. Friendships and fellowship should never be confused.

Walking in the light does not mean perfection of sincere faith, a pure heart, and a clear conscience. However, while there is tremendous harmony of critical Biblical truths between Believers who walk in the light together, there can be considerable differences in perspectives. Despite lively debates, because of love and respect, there is generally an atmosphere of harmony and deference. So, even disagreements are generally much different between friendships and fellowship relationships.

Another major difference is that fellowship-based communities are inclusive while friendship-based communities are often cliquish and exclusive.

(Appendix B describes some who walk in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.)

1 John 2:4-6 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, **but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.** By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Another evidence of walking in the light is a deep respect for the authority of God’s Word, which is a reflection of respect for God. Again, the deceitfulness of the heart allows those who do not walk in the light to profess to believe God’s Word to be absolute truth, but they take exception when God’s standards are inconvenient. In such cases, their pride-of-life motivates them to usurp positions of authority to redefine Biblical Truths according to their desires. “Keeping” God’s Word requires attitudes of total respect, not just strict accountings of does and don’ts.

John 2:15,16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Another evidence of walking in the darkness is the promotion of self-indulgent lifestyles and self-worship. Desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and the pride of life promote goals of pleasure, success, pride in great accomplishments, even spiritual accomplishments, revealing their love of the world, not God.

1 John 3:11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

The hardest quality to counterfeit is genuine love of others. Ironically, counterfeit attempts strive for positions of leadership and service to others but if the true motive is personal success instead of genuine concern for the welfare of others, that is not love.

1 John 3:23,24 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ **and love one another**, just as he has commanded us. **Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.** And by this, we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Important evidence of walking in the light is an abiding relationship with God. As previously discussed, abiding with Christ is the key to fearing God, respecting the absolute authority of His Word, and keeping His commands.

1 John 4:9-12 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** No one has ever seen God; **if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**

1 John 4:16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

If there is evidence of fellowship, respect for God's Word, keeping His commandments, genuine love for others, and abiding friendships with God, Believers can have confidence in their relationship with God. Therefore, these are the challenges and the true tests of discipleship.

#### **Section 4, Conclusions of the goals of discipleship and Challenges:**

The heart of mankind is gripped with the lust-of-the-eyes, the lust-of-the-flesh, and the pride-of-life. These qualities produce powerful temptations of selfishness.

When God reveals Himself to an individual and they sacrifice their pride-of-life, placing Jesus Christ on the throne of their lives, God's Spirit regenerates them, and their spirits are regenerated.

However, God does not remove pride-of-life, so He has commissioned discipleship to challenge, guide, and help Believers to crucify their selfishness, especially their pride-of-life.

The goal of Discipleship is love from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith. Both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul modeled one-on-one discipleship.

The primary goal of sincere faith is for Believers to die to themselves by crucifying their pride-of-life and making Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives.

The goal of developing a pure heart is to develop an abiding friendship with God, becoming living sacrifices.

Sincere faith and a pure heart provide the power to do what is right and to resist doing wrong. More important is for Believers to walk in the light with the Lord Jesus Christ.

These three foundations give Believers the power and desire to genuinely love God and others.

Finally, when Believers have fellowship with other Believers, there is evidence that they walk in the light. When Believers have absolute respect for God's Word and obey His commands they demonstrate fear of the Lord. Another evidence of walking in the light is genuine love for others. The final evidence of walking in the light is when Believers develop a constant awareness of God's presence and abide in fellowship with Him. These qualities are the goals of discipleship resulting in Believers having confidence in their relationship with God.

In summary, effective discipleship is proposed as the solution for many of the challenges in the modern Church. The proposed elements of discipleship are the results of what helped and what hindered Believers (including myself) who have dynamic relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ and love for others. During this project, as some of the principles were identified, I lamented that we were not aware of them when we were raising our now adult children.

## Challenges:

*Leadership*- The first challenge for all Christians, especially leaders, is to honestly evaluate yourself, your family, and everyone you serve. Regardless of any credentials, or “successes”, if God’s love is not the primary driving force, they must throw themselves before God’s mercy, seeking Him in prayer and His Word. And then to work towards perfecting God’s love in their lives.

Discipleship “programs” are sometimes designed around a series of applications. Applications are designed to develop credentials through practice, demonstrating capabilities, and intellectual achievements. They are often measured with checklists. The problem with “applications” is that they usually engage and strengthen pride-of-life. Thus, “knowledge puffs up but love builds up”. The goal must be true transformation, beginning with dying to self (pride-of-life) making Jesus Christ Lord.

2 Timothy 2:2 “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

The pride-of-life motivates all, great and small to desire to be great before men. Some who desire to accomplish great things for God are secretly concerned that one-on-one discipleship is not likely for them to attract recognition. The challenge is to do great things for God or is it important to be a conduit for God to do great things? Thus, God has designed the power of multiplication.

Ephesians 3:14-19, For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—that you, **being rooted and grounded in love**, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

*Failures*- The "fruit" of pride and arrogance (pride-of-life) is often discouragement and resentment towards God. Resentment turns into bitterness; bitterness yields moral failure and moral failures result in further failures (Romans 1). When Believers repeatedly struggle and fail they need to put away their bitterness and anger, embracing God’s love with thankfulness. When they are gripped by God’s love, having a constant awareness of Him (abiding in Christ), their life will be transformed. Not only will their living friendship with God be strengthened but as they strive to be victorious, Jesus Christ becomes Lord of more of their life, purifying their hearts. Effective one-on-one mentors are priceless so the highest priority for those who struggle with sin is to find and submit to discipleship.

*Discipleship Handbook*- Reading, memorizing, reviewing, and meditating on God’s Word are the most effective means for God to transform the mind and the heart. Therefore, the Discipleship Meditation System- A Handbook for Mentors is designed to help mentors guide and encourage Believers to work through the principles of discipleship discussed. The thrust of the Handbook is a series of Scriptures to memorize, review, and meditate on. There are questions for each passage for mentors to help Believers

integrate Biblical truths into their lives. Note: Additional files are available with each of the passages so they can be printed on laser business cards.



## Appendix A, family discipleship:

In the modern Church, a large percentage of children who grow up in Christian homes reject the Lord Jesus Christ by the time they graduate from high school. The model that the modern American Church has used for over a Century is Sunday School and youth group ministries. Sadly, a significant percentage of these programs have failed. However, God gives clear guidelines for how fathers/ parents are responsible and how they should love their children.

*Children belong to God:*

**Psalms 127:3** "Behold, **children are a gift of the LORD**; The fruit of the womb is a reward."

**Psalms 24:1** A Psalm of David. The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world **and those who dwell therein.**

**Isiah 8:18** Here am I and the **children whom the LORD has given me!**

**Genesis. 33:5** And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who *are* these with you?" So he said, "**The children whom God has graciously given your servant.**"

**Ezekiel 16: 20-21** "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. *Were your acts* of harlotry a small matter, "**that you have slain My children** and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through *the fire?*

*Parents are responsible for Children:*

**Ephesians 6:4** And you, **fathers**, do not provoke your children to wrath, but **bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.**

**Deuteronomy 11:18-21** "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. "**You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.** "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, "that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

**Proverbs 1:8** My son, hear the **instruction of your father**, And do not forsake the **law of your mother;**

**Proverbs 22:6** **Train up a child** in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it. (This verse strongly implies that parents are to be the primary teachers.)

*Parents are responsible to train and discipline their children:*

**Proverbs 22:12-14** Apply your heart to instruction, And your ears to words of knowledge. **Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod,** And deliver his soul from hell.

**Proverbs 13:24** He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

*God will judge parents for not properly training their children:*

**Samuel 3:11-14** Then the LORD said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. "In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, **because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.** "And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

Some may argue this application of God's word, however, there are no Biblical exceptions for the responsibility that fathers have towards properly raising their children.

*God has appointed the fathers/ parents to instruct their children:*

**Genesis 18:19** "For I have known him, in order that he may **command his children and his household after him,** that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

**Deuteronomy 4:9** "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. **And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,**

**Exodus 10:2** "and that **you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son** the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I *am* the LORD."

**Joel 1:3** Tell your children about it, Let your children **tell their children,** And their children another generation.

*We are not to allow the ungodly to be peers or teachers of our children:*

**Proverbs 13:20** He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, But the **companion of fools will be destroyed.**

**Psalms 1:1-2** Blessed *is* the man **Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;** But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

**Jeremiah 10:2** Thus says the LORD: "**Do not learn the way of the Gentiles**; Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, For the Gentiles are dismayed at them.

**Luke 6:40** "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained **will be like his teacher**.

**Collisions 2:8** **Beware lest anyone cheat you** through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

*True knowledge and wisdom only come through God's word:*

**Proverbs 1:7** **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge**, *But* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

**Psalms 111:10** **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom**; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*. His praise endures forever.

**Deuteronomy 7:12** " Then it shall come to pass, because **you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them**, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers.

**Matthew 4:4** But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**' "

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All **Scripture** *is* given by inspiration of God, and **is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Since children belong to God and He has given them the sole responsibility to train and discipline them.

And since, there are no Biblical exceptions for anyone other than the parents to raise children.

And since, there is at least one case where God harshly judged a father for not properly training and disciplining his children.

And since, God has appointed the parents as the primary teachers of their children.

And since, children should not have ungodly influences through "companions" or teachers.

And since, true knowledge and wisdom only come through God's Word.

Therefore, God has given the responsibility of raising, disciplining, and training children, only to parents, and primarily to fathers.

No doubt, many will look for loopholes in this conclusion. Two possible examples are Moses and Samuel. Both were raised by families other than their natural-born parents probably after they were three years old. Both of these cases were extremely unique situations. However, these examples say nothing that

diminishes the responsibilities that fathers have towards loving their own children by discipling and appropriately disciplining them.

### **Appendix B, examples of fellowship:**

Of the thousands of Christians that I have met and known over the years, sadly, there has been fellowship with very few fellow believers. Those who walked in fellowship have been such a delight and joy a few words about them is worth mentioning.

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. Mr. B never complained, he was never bitter at God, he walked in the light.

Some of the greatest fellowship that I had was with Mr. J. Shortly after we met, Mr. J was like a brother. He wanted to emphasize the importance of marriage for his children so he and his family drove several hours to give an anniversary party for another dear brother. After the party, as Mr. J finished cleaning up, he suffered a massive heart attack. His wife and children said goodbye as he went to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. I am really looking forward to seeing Mr. J in the future.

Mr. B and Mr. J 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, it should have been these men. I later had to ask God for forgiveness. God's ways are not our ways and I was forced to consider several questions, especially, "what does God really value from His Children?"

Then there was Mr. M, who grew up on a farm. He had a fantastic knowledge of the Bible and Biblical philosophies and was very practical so his perspectives were extremely valuable. 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, working to gain the required credentials, Mr. M had a massive heart attack. He recovered but every time he made another attempt to go to the mission field, God allowed him to have more physical challenges. Mr. M recently went to be with the Lord. I so appreciated our fellowship together. Mr. M had fantastic insight, a desire to honor God, and a close friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, God did not choose to use Mr. M to do great things for His Kingdom, at least from our perspective.

There has only been fellowship with a few pastors, one of which was Pastor D. He was a great pastor in every respect. He held a conviction that he would not remarry divorced individuals so the leadership of his Church fired him. 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 work situations allowed me to spend time

with Pastor D every week before he went to be with the Lord. We discussed so many Biblical issues and truths but the true value was our fellowship.

Another fellow Believer was Dr. D. I didn't have much opportunity to know him very well but I have had great fellowship with some of his children, his grandchildren, and his Timothy. Dr. D walked humbly before God and many came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because he was so effective at demonstrating 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 he flew to India many times over the years. Dr. D shared God's love and then disciplined new believers. He emphasized the importance of sharing the Gospel and for them to disciple others. As a tent-maker, he ministered part-time for over 40 years and went to be with the Lord last year. The result of the discipleship ministry is pushing 10 million. When first hearing about some of the spectacular results, inquiries were made to verify if they were true. It was found that because of the severe persecution of Believers, many of them have gone on to share the Gospel and disciple others. It is estimated that God used Dr. D's efforts to share the Gospel with over 100 million. Dr. D did accomplish great things for God's Kingdom but he had such a love for God, that it is doubtful that his motives were to be recognized to be great. What I find ironic is that God used Dr. D so mightily but 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.

Every one of those who walked in the light, in fellowship, and in love held strong convictions of the sovereignty of God's Word, of the sanctity of marriage, the importance of discipling their children. They never claimed to be perfect. In humility they only clung to righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. They weren't perfect, but when they sinned, they ran towards God instead of running away from Him.

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.

### **Appendix C, marriage:**

Ephesians chapter 5 describes marriage as a model for the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ which has implications for the relationship between Believers and God. God desires to purify the Church and He uses marriage to purify spouses.

Three Greek terms for love are Eros, Philos, and Agape. Marriages built upon Eros love, emotional attachments, romance, and sex are at tremendous risk of failure because the emphasis of Eros love is what each of the partners can selfishly get for themselves. The amplification of pride-of-life. Building any relationship on selfish foundations is building on sand because as soon as either party stops receiving what they want, the relationship gets washed away.

Marriages built upon Philos love (friendships) weather storms much better because they are built on qualities like faithfulness, honesty, dependability, and others. Character qualities demand personal responsibilities, which are not as self-centered and therefore support stronger relationships and

marriages. Both Christian and non-Christian marriages built on Philo's love are often able to survive significant storms.

Because of the deceitfulness of the heart, the natural man can not sustain Agape love. Thankfully, as Believers bow to Jesus Christ as their Lord, they are able to walk in the light and demonstrate Agape love. Only when the Lord Jesus Christ is the center of both spouses' lives, walking in the light are they able to go beyond friendship and have fellowship. The joy and love of these marriages greatly honor and please God. Therefore, the path to building a successful marriage is effective discipleship.

Sadly, in American culture, many relationships and marriages begin with romantic attraction (Eros love). A few of them grow into friendships and fewer yet are ever able to walk in fellowship together. By the very nature of Eros love, the probability of such relationships surviving life challenges is very low. For relationships built on Eros love to survive, the foundation must be transformed from selfishness to serving (the character of friendships), which is very difficult. Given that the devastating numbers of failed marriages within the Church are about the same as non-Christian failures, many marriages within the modern American Church are built on selfish Eros love. Regardless of the foundation of marriages, the key to strengthening marriages is effective discipleship. Those who start with Eros love face tougher challenges but if both spouses are willing to crucify pride-of-life, making Jesus Christ Lord, all marriages can be successful.

The smooth path to a successful marriage is for Believers to walk in the light, respecting others as their brothers and sisters in purity and fellowship. Then if God's design is for a couple to be married, strong friendships will grow out of their fellowship, and romantic love will grow out of their friendship. God delights in marriages where couples both walk in the light with Him.

A comment worth noting is that Believers married to non-Christians must realize that their marriage can never develop beyond Philo's love.

#### **Appendix D, Questions and Concerns:**

Early in my life with the Lord Jesus Christ, He prompted me to attend a local Church. There have been times when I wanted to quit but out of obedience I have consistently attended Bible teaching Churches for over 60 years. There have been a few bright spots but overall it has not been a pretty picture.

There have been so many problems over the years, but many times when I expressed concerns, there has been the response, "if you find the perfect Church, don't join it, you will ruin it". The goal of this writing project is not to define the perfect Believer or the perfect Church but to identify principles for believers to develop dynamic relationships with God, to walk in the light and in fellowship, and to develop genuine communities which will bring honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are spectacular goals but I have seen in my own life and in the life of others that the path is effective discipleship. However, "discipleship" has become a buzzword for many. Therefore, elements of Biblical discipleship are presented. If sincerely applied, God will be faithful to transform the heart and the life of Believers.

## Community:

While the stress of my broken alcoholic family was high, it wasn't all bad. My parents had a circle of drinking buddies that encompassed about 100 people with a core group of about 25. Within the core group, our house was one of the key meeting places. With a potential party every Friday and Saturday night, there were about 8 parties per month. The group would often meet at a local tavern or a bar, but there were usually one or two parties at our house every month.

There was no disagreement that the members of the group were slaves to alcohol, but *most* of those folks were good people and their friendships formed a community. I wasn't very outspoken about my faith, but most of the group knew that I was a Christian. I was amazed at how many times various ones would encourage me to continue to stick to my convictions to not drink or smoke.

They did not necessarily follow Biblical principles but there was a sense of "morality". They held genuine friendship and loyalty very high, but they were fairly tolerant of most others. Ironically, their friendship could be counted on. Sadly, I have not always found these qualities within Christian groups.

I would typically go to bed long before the party was over. One night a lesbian, whom I had never seen before, came into my room, sat on the edge of my bed and we had a long conversation about my relationship with God. She had experienced tremendous heartaches and was seriously seeking answers regarding her relationship with God. I suspected that she had heard about my friendship with God. Hopefully, our conversation was helpful for her but I never saw her again. I continued to pray for her for several years. However, I did see her girlfriend but she always quietly avoided me.

Our house was not very big and the parties would be loud. I slept through the commotion but a change in the "tone" would wake me up. One Friday night there was a problem and as I listened, one of their drinking buddies had been arrested for DUI. The group did not want their buddy to have to stay in jail through the weekend so they made several calls to find money to bail out their buddy. It was about 2:00 in the morning but they continued to call without hesitation. I could only hear half of the conversation but there was never any need for an explanation of why they were calling in the middle of the night or the need for any promises to repay the money. At that time the bail price was about an average month's pay so it was hard to find that much money. However, they did find the money and rescued their buddy. The money was faithfully repaid.

"Wine is a mocker and strong drink is a brawler". Another night I was awakened by a literal fistfight. The incident didn't last long and I went back to sleep. The next morning, one by one, those involved arrived more sober and humble. They asked forgiveness, black eyes and all. They forgave each other and the disagreement was never talked about again. By contrast, I have seen hurt feelings and disagreements, many over small issues, between Christians continue for years. How is it possible that a community of alcoholics set higher bars for friendship and community than Christians?

All of those folks are gone now but I never had any doubts they would be glad to help if I ever called. What has concerned and saddened me is that if I ever had an emergency, my list of Christian friends has always been extremely short. A quest of my life has been to find strong Christian communities but they are very scarce. Therefore, one of the primary goals of this paper is a Biblical path to help local Churches develop solid communities.

Apparently, many Christians consider their circles of Church friends to be "communities". However, many of these "communities" are exclusive cliques that are detrimental to building genuine communities. Most circles of Church friends that I have seen fail to demonstrate the love that Paul described in Philippians 2:20, "For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare."

I have found a few communities and am so thankful for the dynamic relationship that the Believers have with the Lord Jesus Christ. Short descriptions of some who have dynamic relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ are described in appendix B. Such communities should not be rare. My prayer is that new communities will develop as Believers are effectively disciplined, who walk in the light, in fellowship, bringing honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Godly Children:**

Because of the stress in my house, I spent a fair amount of time with the families of my Church peers. I felt that most of them had idyllic families. After spending a fair amount of time in their homes I believed that most of the parents were genuinely concerned about honoring the Lord Jesus Christ. However, by the time we graduated from high school, spending 8 years with my Church peers about 95% of them rejected God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All had made a profession of faith when they were young and were baptized. They all had attended Sunday School and Youth Groups their entire life but apparently, they did not have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

After high school, I was involved in a college ministry. We shared the Gospel with hundreds of students but the fallout rate of those who grew up in Christian homes was about the same. I could not understand that they surely must have had some taste of God's love, but they reject it.

The parable of Matt 13:3-8 seems to describe their relationships with God.

And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. "And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.



The obvious lesson is that “mechanical” prayers and baptism are no guarantee of a relationship with God. Therefore, effective discipleship will challenge those who profess faith to go on to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord (the crucifixion of pride-of-life).

My wife and I did not want our children to be inoculated against the Gospel, so we are thankful that God led us to homeschool. After starting homeschooling, my wife’s question was, “what am I supposed to say when asked why we are homeschooling?” Through the process of searching for the answer, we developed a Biblical conviction for family discipleship (see Appendix A). Homeschooling was challenging, expensive, and time-consuming, but we embraced the challenge that God had appointed for us.

However, back in the late 80s, most of the local Churches that we attended did not appreciate our efforts or that we had or followed Biblically-based convictions. Most started with silent disagreement but gradually they became more antagonistic. Concerning homeschooling, one pastor made the statement from the pulpit, “some families are worshiping the family instead of God”. Another Church leader blatantly pronounced that they “hate home school families”. For us, the choice was to obey the leading that God gave us, but we also had a conviction to faithfully attend local Churches. We attended various local Churches as long as we could until the rejection felt too uncomfortable, so we then moved on. God blessed our family but the situations and attitudes raise significant questions.

### **Church Leadership and moral purity:**

During my high school years, the pastor who was mentoring me confided some of the struggles that he had with the leadership of that small Church. Seeing some of the challenges that Pastors face I developed an idea to encourage and possibly befriend pastors. However, after about 20 such struggles, I was burnt out and had to quit. The self-centered nature of those relationships was thankless but the biggest discouragement was that about a third of those Pastors lost major moral battles and bombed out of the ministry. One of them committed suicide. The failures were obvious but those who went on to be “successful” raised many concerns. They talked a good story but there were significant questions if their purpose was to lift up the Lord Jesus Christ or to gain respect for themselves. I never experienced an ounce of fellowship with any of those Pastors.

As an example, during my high school years, divorce and remarriage weren’t very common in the Church. Sadly, most of those Pastors justified remarriage and I suspect that those Pastors are representative of Church leadership across America as the divorce rate within the Church has continued to climb. Now in recent times, it has become common practice for “Christians” to live together, rejecting God’s design of marriage. Worse, moral impurity within the Church greatly dishonors the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the hallmark of Christians should be love, how can the divorce rate be so similar to non-Christians?

A major contributor to failed marriages is infidelity. Where have been the calls to purity?

A better question is, how can the Church help strengthen Christian marriages?

These and other questions have led me to suspect that there are significant problems with how much of the modern American Churches defines and strives for “success”. It is proposed that insights into the definition of success can be found in the typical criteria for candidates and ongoing ministries:

1. Effective speaking skills.
2. The ability to increase numbers of attendance, converts, baptism, and finances.
3. The correct academic doctrines.
4. An acceptable Theology degree.

These are all important qualities but they are not built on and offer any evidence of successfully crucifying pride-of-life. If Jesus Christ is not Lord, it is not possible to walk in the light. Worse, similar to riches, talents, outward beauty, and political power, such abilities often encourage individuals to not die to themselves but to be puffed up, bolstering pride. A clear measure of pride is when Pastors do not address “pastor worship”.

Adding insult to injury, attendance numbers are so highly regarded by most local Churches that leaders often refuse to address blatant sin. This does not honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is no surprise that God’s standards for leadership requires effective crucifixion of the pride-of-life:

1 Timothy 3:1-7 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be **above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive**, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit (*the pride-of-life*) and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Most in positions of leadership that I have known work hard to appear to meet the requirements but the question is if their motivation is praise and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ or themselves. As discussed, the lack of fellowship, love, and something as simple as hospitality indicates that the driving force in their lives is their pride-of-life. This may sound harsh to some but the following passage sternly warns against valuing accomplishments.

Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, **did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?**’<sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘**I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.**’

“Did we”, is clearly a statement of pride-of-life. Accomplishments only measure what an individual has done, not *who* they are in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are very impressive accomplishments but “I never knew you; depart from me” are possibly the most devastating words that any individual could ever hear.

Therefore, it is critical that ministry success be evaluated from God’s perspective and per His definition.

There appears to be a philosophy by much of the modern American Church leadership that if the right information is taught, and challenges of applications are presented that Christians will mature. Given the tremendous power of the lust-of-the-eyes, the lust-of-the-flesh, and the pride-of-life, the state of maturity of the modern American Church clearly demonstrates such ideas to be fallacious.

Given that very few Church leaders have demonstrated evidence of having an abiding friendship with God, fellowship with Believers, or demonstrations of love, the indication is that most have probably not received the benefits of one-on-one discipleship. It is extremely difficult for those in ministry to give away what they do not have. Therefore, it is highly recommended that ministry leaders find a mentor and work through the Discipleship Handbook.

Then as God transforms your life, following the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul’s examples, it is important for all Church leaders to lead by example by discipling faithful men who will disciple others.

Effective discipleship is the only long-term path for bringing all honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Appendix E, The furnace:**

What does it mean to have a constant awareness of God? Most of the time there was an ongoing conversation between God and me. Many times, I have a joy in the Lord and am just thankful. Temptations come from the world, the flesh, and the devil. God protects me against many temptations and it is as if they just bounce off. However, when I grab onto a wrong thought, idea, or vain imagination, even if it is only for a fraction of a second, it is like the Lord Jesus Christ gently taps me on the shoulder. He doesn’t usually say a word, I know what I have to do. I believe that this is what it means to have an abiding relationship with God.

When I fall into temptations, I ask forgiveness and then determine to put it out of my life. Many times, that is the end of it but, living sacrifices try to wiggle off of the altar. God commands us to burn idols with fire so I constructed a furnace in my mind where I visualize throwing temptations, ideas, thoughts, and pictures in to be burnt into the furnace. If they crawl back out, I purpose not to dwell on them but to quickly throw them back into the fire. For stronger temptations, I watch them burn and sometimes turn up the flames. When I was younger and looked into the furnace, there were smoldering piles of ashes as far as I could imagine. Thankfully, now there are only a few piles of smoldering ashes by the door.