

Developing an Age and Stage Model for Spirit-Empowered Disciples



DO WE HAVE THE COURAGE to de-construct discipleship as it exists today, exchanging rational/behavioral models for relational/experiential models where the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are not optional but imperative?

- Knowledge and behavior are essential, but do not transform!
- Knowledge stops short of the Holy Spirit's destination of loving God and loving others.
- Behavioral effort (doing more or behaving better) cancels grace and creates Pharisees.

What's missing is the imperative of life in the Spirit, experiencing the presence and the power of the living God.

Discerning Solutions:

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship outcomes must be relational and impossible to realize apart from a special work of the Holy Spirit; thus a Spirit-Empowered outcome of *listening to and hearing God* is both relational and requires the Spirit's active presence and work.

A relational framework for organizing 40 Spirit-Empowered Discipleship outcomes draws from a cluster analysis of several Greek (*diakoneo, leitourgeo, douleuo*) and Hebrew words (*'abad, Sharat*) which elaborate on the Ephesians 4:12 declaration that saints (believers) are to be equipped for works of ministry/service (*Eph. 4:11–12*). Therefore 40 Spirit-Empowered faith outcomes have been identified and organized around:

- Serving/loving the Lord
- Serving/loving the Word
- Serving/loving people
- Serving/loving His mission

Begin at the Right Place: Loving God, loving others, making disciples

And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:37–40).

"Go therefore and make disciples of **all** the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe **all** that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:19–20).

Relevant discipleship does not begin with doctrines or teaching, parables or principles, church polity or stewardship—but with loving the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

It's here in loving the Lord that the Spirit's baptism becomes real, His gifts are realized and supernatural intimacy becomes a priority.

A Process for Spirit-Empowered Faith Formation:

"Walk while you have the light lest the darkness overtake you" (Jn. 12:35).

Spirit-Empowered discipleship will require a lifestyle of:

- Fresh encounters with Jesus (Jn. 8:12)
- Frequent experiences of Scripture (Ps. 119:105)
- Faithful engagement with God's people (Mt. 5:14)

The process of the 40 outcomes becoming our identity can be described in four (4) stages as follows:

EXPRESS truths of the faith to others through your identity as a Christ-follower.

EXPERIENCE truths of the faith in everyday life.

EMBRACE truths of the faith in a personal way.

EXPLORE truths of the faith in the safety of accepting relationships.



Allow belonging before believing.



The imperative is moments of personal decision, encounter, and application.



CAUTION! Monday–Friday living is where discipleship too often breaks down.



Selected Outcomes:

A Spirit-Empowered Disciple:

- Listens to and hears God
- Lives life through experiencing Scripture
- Shares His love with near ones beginning at home
- Yields to the Spirit for intimacy and discernment, direction and empowerment

Identity is contagious as others follow this Explore-Embrace-Experience-Express process.

Principles and Best Practices: For imparting a Spirit-Empowered Faith

For each of the four (4) stages on the previous page, principles and best practices have been identified for:

Pastors and Teachers

Example Principle

Church Pastors/Leaders share often of their weekday faith as they impart their very life—and the gospel.

- Students are longing to hear genuineness from their leaders as we live our lives **on mission**.
- If they are to develop a lifestyle of sharing their faith—they need to hear we are sharing ours!
- If they are to live their lives “on mission” they need to hear our “good samaritan” stories (Lk. 10:30–37).

Example Best Practice

While at the ball game this week, I noticed a woman by the concession stand talking frantically on the phone to what sounded like one of her children. I was tempted to walk back into the stands, but found my wife, and together we supported her as we came to know of her daughter’s car accident. The woman had taken the bus to the game and was by herself, so we went with her to the hospital, stayed with her until everything checked out with her daughter, and then took them both to their house.

Disciplers/Mentors

Example Principle

Disciplers/Mentors engage caring community to deepen and affirm the disciples’ contagious faith. For faith to become truly **incarnational**, it’s done in community/fellowship.

“Let **us** run the race set before **us**...” (Heb. 12:1). Not **YOU** run the race, but **US**!

Example Best Practice

Engaged fellowship in community further imparts the truth that this is who we are...and not simply something we do. It’s in community that:

- We sense where we fit in our spiritual gifts and talents—because it’s part of who we are.
- Identity is shaped through honoring others when they are honored and caring for others when they suffer (it’s in **family** that identity is shaped).
- Community is where the value of including others in the family is modeled and instilled.

Churches

Example Principle

Churches provide **time** and **space** for **sharing stories**

- Believing that the Holy Spirit will be at work through one person’s sharing to challenge, convict, enlighten, and empower others through the story.

Example Best Practice

“Today during our “take 5” sharing time—as our instrumentalists play—let’s stand in groups of 2 or 3, reflect on I Pet. 4:10 as each of us has **received the gift** and share with one another a significant time when the Spirit manifested His presence through you: ‘I recall the time when _____ and the Holy Spirit _____.’ After sharing we’ll close in prayer that each of us might be a “good steward of the manifold grace of God.”

Families

Example Principle

Families focus on **catching** children **doing** Bible verses and celebrating!

Example Best Practice

“Jonathan, when you shared your video game with your sister—you were really **doing** a Bible verse of thinking of others” (Phil. 2:3,4).

Transforming Love: Life’s Purpose Transformed

A series of sermons, pre-school, elementary, and youth lessons has been developed which incorporates most of the Spirit-Empowered outcomes with suggestions for Jesus Encounters, Experiences of Scripture and Engaging community with other Jesus followers; this resource collection is being field tested in several countries with a goal of translation into several languages for expanded testing and subsequent refinement of the discipleship task force’s work.