

# HOW DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?

Our primary question is not, *How do we connect people?* Rather, our main question is, *How do we make disciples?*

## DEFINITIONS

**Disciple** = *a follower of Jesus (a Christian)*

\* All Christians are disciples. There is no distinction between converts and disciples. Disciples may be strong or weak, growing or stagnant, powerful or impotent. But all born-again believers are disciples of Jesus.

**Healthy Disciple** = *a follower of Jesus who is growing in love of God and others.*

\* A healthy disciple is *growing*, even though he or she may not yet be mature or strong. While we want to eventually have mature disciples, it starts with having healthy disciples—people all along the spectrum of development who are growing in love of God and others.

**Mature Disciple** = *a follower of Jesus who has consistently grown in love of God and others.*

\* The description of a mature disciple gets quite long, ultimately reflecting the character, attitude and behavior of Jesus. A summary of these traits:

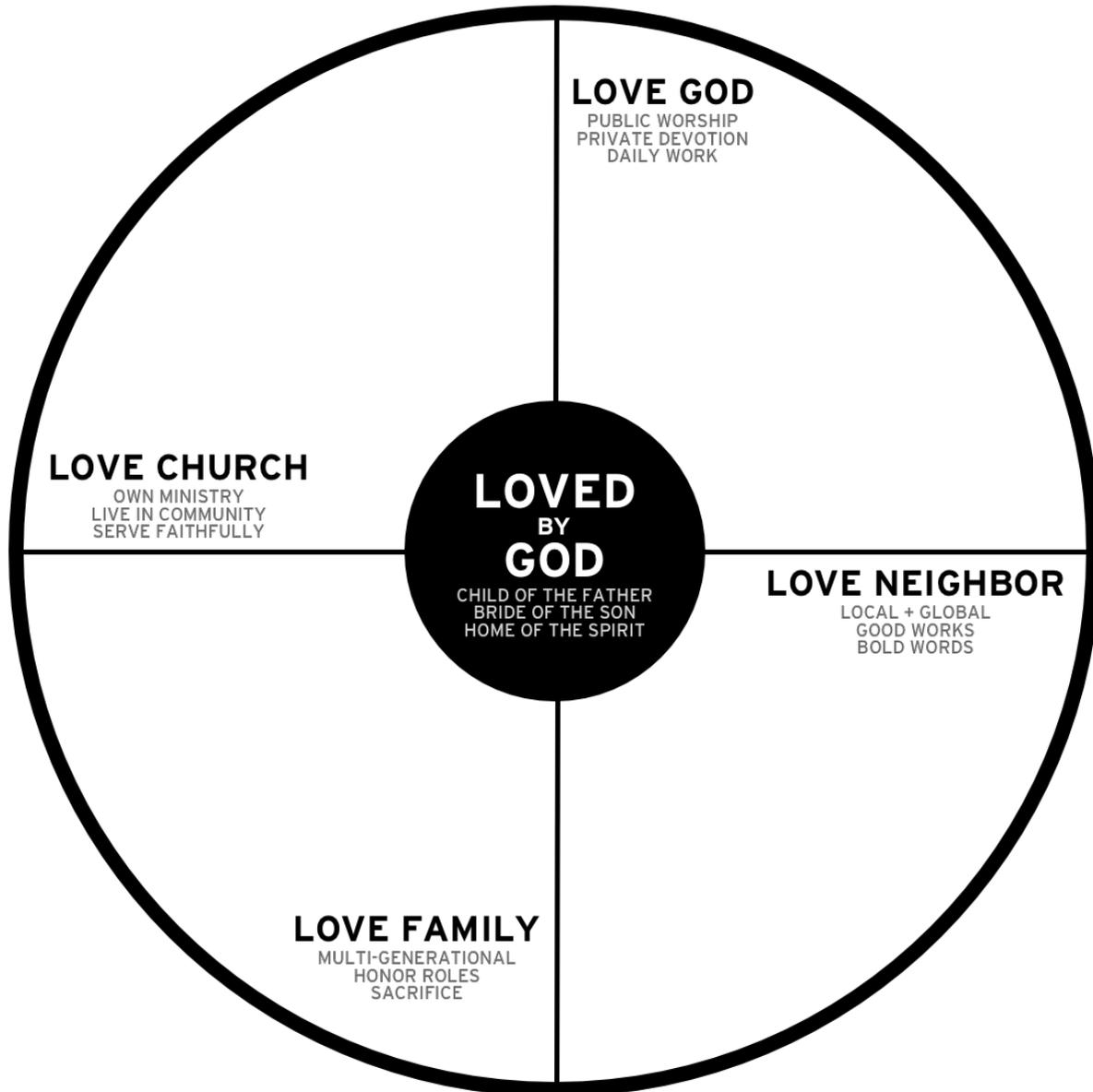
- Character is submitted to the Lordship of Christ
- Committed to the local church
- Creative in using gifts for ministry
- Compelled by love to influence non-Christians
- Competent in understanding the Scriptures, people and culture
- Calm in turmoil

**Discipleship** = *helping one another grow in love of God, family, church, and neighbor.*

\* This definition allows all Christians, regardless of gifts or personality, to play a role in making disciples. Additionally, it assumes that the entire church is necessary, while still being helpful in small group or one-on-one settings.

## THE WHEEL

For somebody to be a healthy disciple, he or she must be growing in love of God and others. The wheel image provides a helpful illustration—as well as an easily transferable tool—of the five loves involved in spiritual growth.



### Loved by God

The hub of the wheel is the core out of which a disciple lives—a growing awareness of how he or she is loved by God. This love—expressed ultimately in the person and work of Jesus Christ—makes a Christian a child of the Father, the bride of the Son, and the home of the Holy Spirit. Growing disciples continually rediscover the gospel, seeing this good news as not just the doorway into God’s kingdom but the key to ongoing growth in grace.

Out of this hub flows spokes of love: God, Family, Church and Neighbor. A disciple’s growth will be strong or stunted to the degree that each of these spokes is strong or stunted.

### Love God

The first half of Jesus’ “Great Commandment” is to love God with everything (Matt 22:37-38). Therefore, it makes sense that we would emphasize loving God. In God’s presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11), and our lives are to be lived for God’s glory in all circumstances and situations (Col 3:23). Jesus compared salvation to experiencing God as a treasure (Matt 13:44), so loving God is crucial for a person’s spiritual growth.

Loving God involved many aspects of a disciple's life, including regular public worship of God, private devotion to God (in prayer, Bible reading and other spiritual practices), and doing one's daily work for God's glory.

The second half of Jesus' "Great Commandment" is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:39). This may raise the question, "Why divide *loving neighbor* into three distinct categories (Family, Church, and Neighbor)?" The answer is that though Jesus' command emphasizes loving anybody who you come across in need (as illustrated by Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan), it is helpful for people to think about the specific areas of life where love of others is required.

### **Love Family**

While the other loves (God, church, neighbor) seem most obvious, emphasizing love of family is also crucial for our discipleship.

The first command in Scripture necessitates family (Gen 1:28) and the first institution in Scripture is family (Gen 2:24). After sin enters the world, the consequences and curses of sin directly impact the family (Gen 3:15). The escalating seriousness of sin is seen in conflict among the family, specifically in Cain's murder of Abel (Gen 4:8). When God floods the world, his grace is seen in preserving a family (Gen 8:15-18). When God calls Abraham with the promise of creating a new people, his promise is dependent on family (Gen 12:1-2). When God gives Moses the Ten Commandments, three explicitly had to do with honoring family relationships (Ex 20:12, 14, 17). The Bible is filled with stories about families and specifically about God's faithfulness to preserve the family line of the Messiah (Gen 3:15). Because of Christ's faithfulness, we are adopted into a family where God is our Father (Gal 4:4-7) and Jesus is our elder brother (Heb 2:11). Though this familial theme is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, family relationships remain crucial, with marriage being a representation of Christ's love for his church (Eph 5:25-32), and strong family leadership being a prerequisite for leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:2-4).

Additionally, from a practical ministry perspective, family is a key context in which most people experience life and relationships. People's experiences of God's love are shaped by their family relationships. Much of the pastoral counseling we do relates to marriage and family issues. Sermons, series, classes, and events that focus on singleness, marriage and parenting are always well attended because people sense their need for help in these areas. The fact that some people elevate the importance of family to idolatrous levels does not change the fact that many people need to be inspired, equipped and encouraged to obey God in the context of family.

Finally, from a missional perspective, emphasis on loving family seems like an important statement in a culture that is increasingly devaluing family. As people wait longer to marry, are more likely to cohabit before/without marriage, have more children outside of marriage and without present fathers, redefine marriage altogether, divorce easily and repeatedly, and disregard their elderly parents and grandparents, the church has an opportunity to model what healthy family can and should be. The church can be a light to the nations, whether in encouraging God's people to honor their past family (parents and grandparents), present family (spouse, kids, siblings) or future family (future spouse, kids, grandchildren).

### **Love Church**

Jesus died for his church (Eph 5:25). The church is the new humanity—a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession who proclaim his excellencies to a watching world (1 Pet 2:9). The vast majority of the New Testament's one-another commands are to the church, and if God's people are ever to love their unbelieving neighbors, they must also love fellow members of Christ's church (John 13:35).

While loving church indicates commitment to institution of the local church, the focus of this spoke is loving believers—men, women and children who comprise the church. This means that growing disciples are growing in their affection, care and service of fellow disciples. Growing disciples see themselves as owners of the ministry rather than just consumers of it. They also actively participate in the life of the church community (usually in smaller groups) and they use their gifts to serve others.

## Love Neighbor

God is a missional God, sending his Son Jesus to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). This mission is local, regional and global (Acts 1:8), extending as far as there are people. God's people are to love their neighbors through good works (Matt 5:16) and bold words (Col 4:2-6).

Since, like Jesus, the church is sent to the unbelieving world (John 20:21), Christians must love their unbelieving neighbors. In a shrinking world, this means loving unbelievers across the office or street as well as across the border or ocean. Growing disciples are growing in their love of people far from God.

## **HOW DO WE USE THIS WHEEL TO MAKE HEALTHY DISCIPLES?**

1. We train our leaders to understand and use this wheel diagram in their personal lives and in their discipleship relationships. It is easily transferable and can effectively diagnose areas where focus and growth are needed or help celebrate progress that has been made.
2. We've created a first-step class (Start Here) that casts this four loves vision for people who are new to the church or want to get involved. Rather than just turning people loose into activity, we will cast vision for how we intend to help them grow. As much as possible, this class will be a non-negotiable starting point for participation in organized church activities.
3. We use the wheel to create resources, tools, environments and experiences that will help our people grow in the four loves. Whether through introductory classes for people exploring faith, experiences that strengthen families, tools that help people engage the Bible, or a host of other ideas, we will make sure that we are providing practical helps for people who identify areas where they need to grow.
4. We've crafted questions—based on the wheel—that can be used in any discipleship setting:

### LOVED BY GOD

- On a scale of 1-10, how confident do you feel to pray?
- What truth about God is currently gripping your heart?

### LOVE GOD

- How many times per week do spend time reflecting on Scripture and praying?
- How is Jesus becoming more of a treasure to you?

### LOVE FAMILY

- On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable do your family members feel approaching you about their concerns or issues?
- What is one thing your family members need from you right now?

### LOVE CHURCH

- How many "3:00am friends" do you have at Redemption Gateway?
- Complete the sentence: I help my church in its mission to make disciples by \_\_\_\_\_.

### LOVE NEIGHBOR

- How many times in the last three months have you shared the gospel with one of your peers? (friend, family, neighbor, colleague)
- Who are 3 non-Christians that you regularly pray for?

5. We work hard to develop helpful ways to measure growth in the four loves. We will not just hope it happens, nor will we use surveys or measurements to just feel good about ourselves. Rather, we will identify ways that we can measure and advance the spiritual growth of individuals and the congregation as a whole.