

DISCIPLESHIP IN CRISIS

9 REASONS WHY DISCIPLESHIP ISN'T WORKING TODAY
PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

A hand is shown reaching up from the surface of the ocean. The water is dark and rippled, and the background is a bright, hazy sky. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame, with fingers slightly spread. The overall tone is dramatic and evocative.

FRANK VIOLA

Introduction

When I was in my early 20s, I was told about "discipleship." And so were all my Christian friends.

Most of the churches and para-church organizations to which I belonged had their own discipleship programs. And with minor variations, they were all the same.

The problem was, I saw very little transformation through these programs. In my friends and in myself.

Fast forward two decades later.

I see history repeating itself.

Discipleship is all the rage today in the evangelical Christian world.

But is it working?

In this short eBook, I will explore that question.

In some quarters of the Christian populace, the claim is that it's working great.

But based on my experience and observation at least, it's not working in countless cases.

Why would I say that discipleship isn't working today in the lives of so many Christians?

First, the ultimate mark of a disciple is found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 9:23-24:

In everything, therefore, TREAT PEOPLE THE SAME WAY YOU WANT THEM TO TREAT YOU, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must DENY HIMSELF, and TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever LOSES HIS LIFE for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

We'll come back to these two texts.

The problem, as I see it, is that there are a boatload of false assumptions about what a disciple of Jesus really is. And there are some crucial missing ingredients on the subject that are rarely if ever taught.

In the following pages, therefore, I will highlight each problem as I see it -- 9 in all -- and offer a viable solution for each one.

Problem 1: The Tool of Guilt

Many Christian teachers teach that the way to cure lukewarmness is to make God's people feel guilty and condemned. So guilt is a tool that's used as the "driver" for spiritual fervor and zeal.

In Jesus Manifesto, I said that most preachers need a travel agent to handle all the guilt trips they put on God's people.

Guilt doesn't work . . . long term.

Yes, you can guilt people into following Jesus and being a "good Christian."

For awhile.

Then it wears off.

Not to mention that Jesus set us free from guilt, condemnation, and shame.

The enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is one thing. Guilt is quite another.

So guilt doesn't work here, folks. In fact, it back-fires.

Eventually and always.

The Tool of
GUILT

Problem 2: Youthful Enthusiasm

Many Christians start out on their spiritual journeys "on fire," but the embers gradually grow dim and they are left feeling cold toward the Lord and His Word.

This is particularly true for young believers in their teens and twenties.

What's happening?

It's called youthful enthusiasm.

In the 1960s, young people would often say, "Don't trust anyone over 30."

Well, in the Christian walk, you would be wise not to trust anyone under 30 when it comes to giving them responsibility in the Lord's work.

The reason is simple. You don't know who a person is until they get past the "Catch-30 crisis."

That's when we all reevaluate our priorities and the decisions we made in our youth.

The number of "on-fire" Christians who bail out between the ages of 28 and 32 is enormous.

So putting all sorts of responsibility and "service" on their shoulders when they are in their 20s is a mistake. And it will often lead to burn-out or bail-out when they reach their 30s.

When the embers of youthful enthusiasm fade away, the individual is faced with whether or not they want to truly serve Jesus Christ or whether their Christian experience was built on feelings and emotions.

A person's 20s should be spent on knowing the Lord, allowing the cross to work in their lives (which includes God's breaking work), losing one's life, and discovering how to live by the indwelling life of Jesus Christ.

It's no accident that Old Testament priests were prepared for their ministries during their 20s and didn't become priests until they were 30.

Interestingly, Jesus Himself didn't begin His ministry until He reached 30 years of age.

Historically, many men have built movements on the flames of youthful enthusiasm. And when those flames die out, they get a new batch of people to excite and motivate. And the cycle continues.

But we have not so learned Jesus Christ.

Youthful
ENTHUSIASM

Problem 3: An Unbiblical Prescription

In general, Christians want to discover how they can become more like Jesus. We are often told that in order to be a good disciple of Jesus, you must do these seven things:

Pray

Read your Bible

Go to church

Tithe

Witness

Do your best to do what Jesus said to do.

Disciple others by teaching them to do these same things.

Follow those seven steps and, voila, you're a disciple.

But is that what the New Testament envisions for the life of a disciple? Can we find this formula in the apostles and the early Christians?

Well, let's take each point one by one:

Pray – yes, the early Christians prayed, but not like most believers do. They understood that the highest form of prayer is *fellowship*, which is a two-way communication. They also knew how to follow their spiritual instincts.

Read the Bible – the early disciples didn't have Bibles. The Old Testament was virtually inaccessible and the New Testament hadn't been written yet.

(When Paul's letters and the Gospels were written, they were circulated. But there were no printing presses in those days, so they were scarce. And most of the early Christians couldn't read or write.)

The Jewish Christians certainly heard the Scriptures read in the synagogue from childhood and they had outstanding memories. And when the apostles came around, the Christians heard the preaching of the Word.

But their encounters with the Word of God were much more than learning the written Scriptures, which they learned orally. There was something else involved. They knew how to encounter God in the Scriptures and feed upon His living Word.

Tithe – the early Christians didn't tithe until well after the death of the apostles. They certainly gave to others, but they didn't follow Israel's income tax system (which was actually more than 10%). They gave according to their abundance.

Go to church – the early Christians didn't "go to church." They *were* the church and they *gathered* regularly. They had meetings, but they were a shared-life community first and foremost.

Witness – the early Christians witnessed to the life of Christ by their deeds. And the apostles and evangelists proclaimed the gospel in different parts of the world.

But there was no evangelistic program that the early believers obsessed over. They certainly shared their faith by the leading of the Spirit, but their lives were epistles written by God's Spirit.

Do your best to do what Jesus said – the early believers didn't take the words of Jesus like they took the Old Testament Law, in a legal way, trying to fulfill His words in their own power and strength. There was something else at work.

Consequently, there is a MISSING INGREDIENT in discipleship today that answers the question of *how* to become like Jesus.

An Unbiblical

PRESCRIPTION

A Solution to Problems 1, 2 and 3

In this free audio, I deal with these three problems head-on and offer what I believe to be a viable solution that covers each of them.



SOLUTION

Problem 4: Will Power

Countless Christians have burned out when undergoing discipleship trainings and programs. This is because these trainings and programs are strong on pursuing mental knowledge and exercising the will, rather than on how to *lay hold of* the source of all spiritual power and vitality.

The way to be like Christ, as it's commonly taught, is by imitating Jesus. I believe this emphasis is correct. But it's not complete.

Christian leaders have been telling God's people that they must "be like Christ" for the last six hundred years (at least). The well-known book by Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, was published around 1418.

Some 480 years later, Charles M. Sheldon's book *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* was published. Ever since then, Christians have been trying to "do what Jesus did."

But this "gospel" hasn't worked. The reason? It's an instance of asking the wrong question. The question is not "What would Jesus do?" I believe it's "What *is* Jesus Christ *doing* through me ... and through us?"

Jesus made pretty clear that we cannot live the Christian life.

Instead, He must live it through us.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

Shockingly, Jesus Himself could not live the Christian life without His Father:

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing." (John 5:19)

By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. (John 5:30)

So how exactly did Jesus live His life while on earth? If He couldn't do anything on His own, how did He live so flawlessly?

Look at His answer:

Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.

I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Jesus did not live by His own natural strength. Instead, He lived by the energy of His Father who indwelt Him.

He spoke when His Father spoke through Him.

He worked when His Father worked through Him.

He made judgments when His Father judged within Him.

Jesus only did what the Father did, and He did it by means of His Father's indwelling life.

Therein lies the root of Jesus' amazing life. Yet few people talk about it today.

We know that Jesus lived by His Father's life. But what about us fallen mortals? What about us Christians?

According to the many sermons we hear preached today, one would think that Jesus gave us a completely different way to live than the way He lived.

The presupposition that sits underneath virtually every sermon heralded today and most of the Christian books that fill bookstores is that we can live the Christian life if we just try hard enough. If we just study our Bible more, pray more, witness more, tithe more, hear more sermons . . . then we can be like Jesus.

But that's not the gospel.

The gospel teaches that just as Jesus couldn't do anything of Himself, we can't do anything of *ourselves*.

Listen to the Lord again: "Without *Me* you can do nothing."

The "Christian life" is impossible. It's only *Him*-possible.

We can try as hard as we wish to be like Christ, but human effort will never touch the hem of that garment. It's like trying to square a circle. It's like paddling into the gale with one oar. It's like building and operating a motel along a highway that never gets built.

The glory of the gospel is that we who are fallen, tarnished, and marred have been invited to live our lives in the exact same way that Jesus lived His life: by an indwelling Lord.

Let's go back to resurrection day. It is evening. Jesus appears to ten fearful men in a sealed room. He penetrates the door and stands before them.

The Lord bids them peace, and then He takes a deep breath.

As a resurrected, life-giving Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ breathes into these men the wind of God's own life.

Behold we show you a mystery: Just as God the Father lived in Jesus, so now God the Son will begin to live in these ten men. The "only begotten" has now become "the firstborn among many brethren," and God is now the Father of these disciples.

Go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father, and your Father, and to My God and your God."

From this point on, the apostles began to live their lives the same way Jesus Christ lived His—by the power of an indwelling Lord. The passage moved from the Father living out His life in the Son, to the Son living out His life in the disciples.

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. (John 6:57 KJV)

Point: What the Father was to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is to you. *He's your indwelling Lord.* When the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom, He got out and we got in.

Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.

But there is more.

A large part of being a disciple is to be awakened to an indwelling Christ—not as a doctrine or theology, but as a living, breathing Person whose life we can live by.

Paul's central message was "Not I, but Christ" and "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (See Rom. 8; Col. 1; Gal. 2; and John 14—17, where Jesus Himself spoke about His indwelling just before His death.)

Jesus Christ lived His life by an indwelling Father. In the same way, we as believers can live the Christian life only by an indwelling Christ.

But we must be taught how.

In short, the goal of the gospel is not to get you out of hell and into heaven, but to get God out of heaven and into you.

Problem 5: Eating from the Wrong Tree

Christians are rarely if ever taught how to live by the life of Christ who indwells them. So they rely on their own will to be a “good Christian.” In other words, they live by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil rather than by the Tree of Life.

When the Creator planted the garden of Eden, He put two trees in the center of it. Today, these same trees stand at the center of life.

The meaning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil can be understood by the serpent’s promise: “By eating from this tree, you will be making your *own* decision. You will be like God, determining for *yourself* what is right and what is wrong.”

The fall of humanity was all about women and men assuming the posture that they don’t need anyone to tell them what to do. They would decide for themselves what’s good and what’s bad.

They would be self-sufficient and self-determining. Of course, what was ignored in that whole discussion is the tree of life.

God wanted humans to eat from the tree of life. Eating from the tree of life meant receiving the uncreated life of God into oneself. The tree of life was God’s own life made accessible to human beings.

Today, the tree of life is the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am the true vine. . . . As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

When we receive Christ, we receive the life of God. Divine life becomes ours. Receiving Christ is simply taking the first bite from the right tree.

Living by God’s life is very different from living by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A person who is living by the tree of life doesn’t sit back and say, “Let me try to do good and avoid evil.” Instead, he allows the life of God to flow within and through him. He *yields* to the instincts, promptings, and energy of that God-life.

You see, “good” is a form of life. And only God is good. Here are the two choices before you today:

1. The choice to intellectually *know* good from evil and to *try* to do good = the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
2. Living by the life of God, which is goodness itself = the tree of life.

Mark it down: the knowledge of good is the accepted counterfeit to living by life.

The Christian religion is built on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Christian religion can be studied using the same categories of thought used to study any other world religion.

It can be analyzed just as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism are analyzed. The difficulty with the Christian religion (like all religions) is that it makes its adherents think that they have now found the real knowledge of good and evil.

Religion gives people the notion that they have God under control. Religion says that we can understand God absolutely and completely. We can predict what the Almighty will do tomorrow.

The Christian religion teaches that the Bible answers virtually every question that's brought to the sacred text. The problem with this line of thought is that the true God cannot fit into anyone's box.

God will always end up breaking out of our human expectations and understanding. Every attempt to capture God and cram and ram Him into a system will ultimately fail. The true God is an untamed lion. He cannot be controlled. The true God *is* the controller.

Yet many Christians have turned the Bible into a form of the knowledge of good and evil. They approach the Bible as raw material by which they can gain control over their lives, so life can be more understandable and under control, less unnerving and unpredictable.

This is a profoundly grievous misuse of the Bible. Jesus didn't misuse the Scriptures to gain control and predictability in His own life. To Him, the Scriptures were simply the joystick on the Father's controller. They were the instrument through which He got to know His Father better and to discover how to live out His mission.

Problem 6: Imitation Misconceived

Christians are taught that being a disciple means imitating Jesus.

So "follow me" gets translated into "read what Jesus did in the Bible, and then do the same thing."

But this is all external.

It's like saying, "Here's an orange. Now create one yourself out of whole cloth."

That's impossible. An orange is an organic thing. One must plant a seed, water it, watch it grow, and behold, an orange will eventually come forth.

When Jesus said "follow me," He wasn't just talking about imitating what He did. He was talking duplicating the engine that drove His own life and ministry.

"Follow me," not only means, obey my teachings. But more, it means "get a hold of the same source that I relied upon to live my life. Imitate what I did to get in touch with the one who indwelt me."

To follow isn't about trying to imitate the fruit. It's about tapping into the root.

The only way you and I can truly imitate Jesus' external lifestyle is to imitate His internal relationship with His Father. That was the root behind all that He did.

The way He treated people was outward fruit of His ability to live by His Father's life.

Imitating Jesus, therefore, is not a matter of trying to mimic the outward things He did (as if we can actually do that in our own energy).

It's rather a matter of imitating the way He lived His life. It's to get in touch with the engine of His outward activities and to "do likewise."

This puts us on a collision course with the issue of living by an indwelling Lord . . . which is the forgotten key to Christian discipleship.

A Solution to Problems 4, 5 and 6

After many years of wrestling with these three problems, I sketch out a solution in this free audio.



SOLUTION

Problem 7: Individualism

Note that in the New Testament, “disciple,” “convert,” “believer,” and “Christian” are all used interchangeably.

The word “discipleship” is often used today to refer to the biblical idea of being conformed or formed into Christ’s image. It’s a word that describes Christian growth or spiritual formation. The biblical term for this is “transformation.” But we will use “discipleship” as a synonym for transformation in this piece even though the New Testament never uses it this way.

Here are the two streams of discipleship that I observe:

1) There are those who say, “What’s important is discipleship; the church is irrelevant. Let’s not discuss the church; let’s instead discuss how to make disciples.”

When people talk that way, it shouts one fact: That our understanding of church has gotten far afield from what it was in the New Testament.

When people make such statements, they are really talking about how church has been done traditionally (and that can include “churches” that gather in homes, parks, and pubs).

Whenever people think of “church” through a traditional lens, it’s not hard to see the pressing need for discipleship.

2) The other camp rightly understands that you cannot separate disciple-making from the *ekklesia*. You cannot separate the forming of people into full-fledged followers of Jesus and a living, breathing, vibrant community that gathers under His headship.

To put it another way, you can’t separate discipleship from the *ekklesia* any more than you can separate child-rearing from the family. And you can’t separate the *ekklesia* from Jesus Himself, for it’s His very body.

I want you to imagine a saltwater fish. The fish can only survive in his natural habitat, which is the ocean. Why? Because the ocean surrounds the fish with everything it needs to live, breathe, and have its being.

The fish is also a dependent creature. Fish swim in schools.

Now consider a different image. Imagine that this fish is removed from the ocean and from its school and is thrown in someone’s backyard. People take turns spraying the fish with a water hose every 15 minutes. They also sprinkle salt on its body.

That’s an apt picture of modern discipleship.

Discipleship has been separated from the Christian’s native habitat (*ekklesia*) and it’s become a highly individualistic event. An *individual* discipler “disciples” an *individual* disciplee to become a better *individual* disciple.

And we have not so learned Jesus Christ.

INDIVIDUALISM

Christianity has and always will be a collective, corporate life and pursuit.

The issue, therefore, is not discipleship. The issue is restoring the *ekklesia* as God intended it to be, for the *ekklesia* is the Christian's native habitat. And out of it flows everything else.

The fish metaphor brings us face-to-face with a question that's rarely asked today: *How did the apostles who received the original commission of Jesus to "make disciples of all nations" carry out this commission?*

If you read the New Testament chronologically from Acts to Revelation, there's only one answer you can come up with. They did so by planting *ekklesias* all over the known world.

I invite anyone to challenge me on that point.

Converts were made and sustained into full-fledged followers of the Messiah, naturally and organically, simply by being part of the local *ekklesia* in their city. For them, the *ekklesia* was the environment for spiritual training. It was, as T. Austin-Sparks put it, "the school of Christ."

The Twelve knew *ekklesia* themselves. They lived in an embryonic expression of it in Galilee with Jesus Himself. For 3 ½ years the Twelve and some women lived in community with one another where Jesus was both the center and the head of their life together.

When a Christian lives in a living expression of the Body of Christ today, he or she is being disciplined just by being part of that expression. Just as a saltwater fish grows, is nurtured, and is sustained simply by living in the ocean and swimming with its school.

Ekklesia, therefore, is the birthright of every child of God. By living in it, God's people naturally absorb Christ. This is because in an authentic *ekklesia*, the life of Jesus Christ is constantly flowing, being shared, expressed, revealed, and imparted by and to the members. To wit, the Christian is "discipled" by Christ and into Christ through the community of the believers when it is functioning as it should.

I don't say this theoretically. I've watched it happen countless times over the last 23 years in healthy *ekklesias*.

Those who are called to plant *ekklesias* today, therefore, carry out the so-called "Great Commission." They make disciples (converts) and establish them into communities where the Holy Spirit does the work of transformation (what many are calling "discipleship" today).

Another observation I make is that people who are jazzed about discipleship (usually males in their mid-to-late 20s and early 30s – their leaders being in their 40s and 50s), seem to have no knowledge of the history of modern discipleship, where it came from, and why it even exists.

The story harkens back to John Nelson Darby's teachings in the early 19th century. Darby used the art of proof-texting the New Testament to separate conversion from following Jesus.

The gulf between conversion and followership further widened with the emergence of Dallas Theological Seminary and the early teachers there. They perpetuated Darby's doctrine which separated faith in Jesus as *Savior* from following Jesus as *Lord*.

What happened as a result should look familiar to you. The Christian landscape became peppered with many converts to Christianity who possessed fire-insurance policies, but few of them were actually following Jesus as this world's true Lord.

The antidote was discipleship as a method and a program. Para-church organizations took the helm on this and ran with it. They created the first discipleship "programs." Denominational churches began picking it up as well.

What did it look like? The "disciple" would meet with their "discipler" at least once a week. They would memorize Scripture together or study a Biblical text, go over sins committed (this is called "holding each other accountable"), pray together, discuss witnessing to the lost, and set a date for the next "discipleship" meeting.

Young Christians were excited about it at first, but in time, they began to see the rotteness of it all. This left the door wide open for a strong reaction against the routine, the drudgery, and the staleness of discipleship as a method.

Walking through that door was the greasy grace movement. This was an overamplified version of Darby's teachings taken to the extreme. "Do whatever you please because you are under grace" was the mantra. While this was going on, the Lord hit America with a huge revival, and many young people in the counter-culture were coming to Christ.

Some very gifted ministers took the wheel of that revival and spawned a new movement that became known as the "discipleship" movement (also called the "shepherding" movement). They reinstated all the old methods of discipleship, but they introduced a new theology and vocabulary to go with it. It was the theology of "submission to delegated authority."

When the dust finally cleared, the discipleship movement left a trail of bruised and battered souls, some of whom have never recovered to this good day. In the minds of many Christians, "discipleship" became a four-letter word. So the pendulum against legalism and authoritarianism swung hard again.

The Christian landscape became quickly populated with nominal Christians and lukewarm believers who simply "prayed the prayer" (i.e., the "sinner's prayer").

As a reaction to the growing lukewarmness and nominal professions, "discipleship" has returned. It's back in vogue again to try and repair the damage. Yet the advocates of modern discipleship are largely ignorant of the history behind it. So we are back to spraying fish on the lawn again.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

~George Santayana

What history teaches us is that men have never learned anything from it.

~G. W. F. Hegel

INDIVIDUALISM

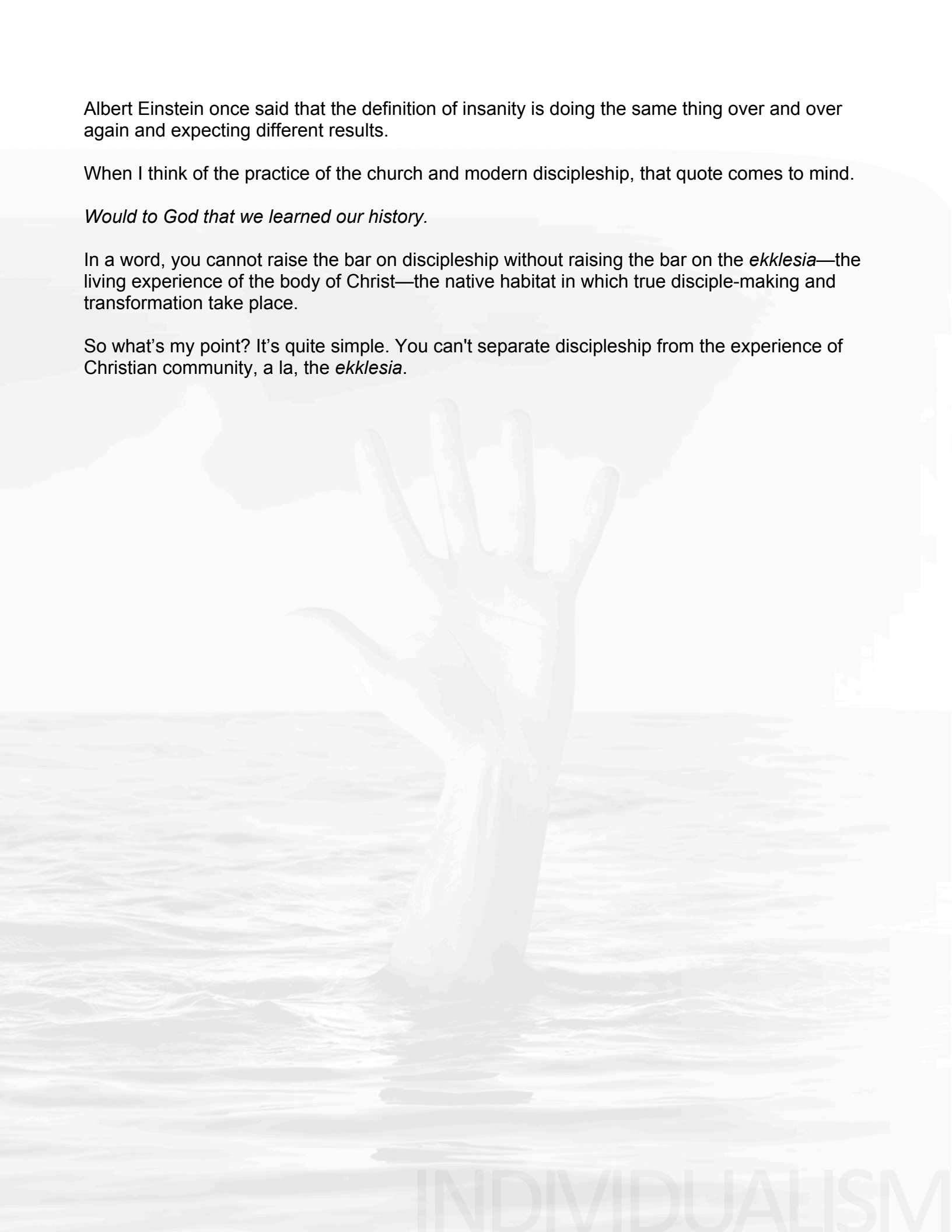
Albert Einstein once said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

When I think of the practice of the church and modern discipleship, that quote comes to mind.

Would to God that we learned our history.

In a word, you cannot raise the bar on discipleship without raising the bar on the *ekklesia*—the living experience of the body of Christ—the native habitat in which true disciple-making and transformation take place.

So what's my point? It's quite simple. You can't separate discipleship from the experience of Christian community, a la, the *ekklesia*.



INDIVIDUALISM

Problem 8: A Lack of Spiritual Consciousness

Most Christians have almost no understanding of the consciousness of divine life and how to discern the Lord's leading within them. They do not understand how to follow their regenerated spiritual instincts.

The reason for this is simple. They've never been taught.

You can't pass on to others what you don't know yourself.

In contemporary evangelical Christianity, the emphasis is on the mind and the will when it comes to knowing the Lord. In the Pentecostal world, the emphasis is on the emotions.

But the deepest part of us is neither mind, will, or emotion.

As a new creation in Christ, you have spiritual instincts.

In fact, all of those instincts match your physical senses.

The New Testament talks about spiritual seeing, spiritual touching, spiritual tasting, spiritual handling, and spiritual hearing.

These are the faculties of your Spirit-regenerated human spirit.

Jesus was very much in touch with His spiritual instincts, and hence, He "perceived" things "in His spirit" that were outside natural means.

He did this as a man anointed by the Holy Spirit, not because He was God. Paul, Peter, and others in the New Testament exhibited the same sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

This aspect of living the Christian life has been almost lost to us. But it's yet another reason why discipleship doesn't work too well today.

Problem 9: Self-Denial Overlooked

If you ask most evangelical Christians what marks a true disciple of Jesus, their answers will mostly be external.

They read their Bibles every day.

They evangelize.

They go to church.

They pray daily.

They are part of an "accountability" group.

While these things are good, they are mostly surface. They don't touch on what real discipleship is all about.

The deeper things that go straight to our characters are often neglected or not understood.

Look again at Jesus' definition of discipleship in Luke 9:

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must DENY HIMSELF, and TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever LOSES HIS LIFE for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

A disciple of Jesus, therefore, knows how to die. They know how to lose, They know how to lay things down.

To be specific, a person who has learned to be a disciple in the school of Christ . . .

doesn't defend themselves when rightly corrected or unjustly attacked.

they don't lose their tempers when under pressure.

they never entertain slander against another human being and they sure don't spread it.

they are profoundly teachable and can be corrected easily without justifying or rationalizing themselves.

it is not difficult for them to say "I am sorry" and "I was wrong."

when spoken evil against, they remain silent, and even return good for evil.

they take the high road when under the gun.

they will sacrifice themselves and their egos for others.

they treat other people the same way they want to be treated in every situation (Matt. 7:12).

These are the neglected aspects of discipleship and spiritual transformation.

All of these traits have the marks of the brokenness of God and the aroma of Jesus Christ upon them.

True discipleship, then, teaches God's people how to get in touch with their spiritual instincts. And those instincts will lead us to serve, to sacrifice, and to lose.

I've met many Christians who had all the "external things" right.

Yet they would defend themselves at the drop of a hat, they would believe and spread gossip and slander about others, and they could not receive correction from either their peers or those ahead of them in the Lord, and they didn't know how to admit wrong-doing or lose.

Such people were unbroken. They were self-righteous souls, living in their flesh (their "religious flesh" that is), and they knew very little about the deeper work of God in their lives.

True discipleship is all about bearing the cross and carrying the spirit of the Lamb.

A Solution to Problems 7, 8 and 9

So what is the solution to these 3 problems? [I sketch some of it out in this free audio.](#)



There's So Much More...

What I've written in this eBook is just the tip of the iceberg. The solutions go much deeper and wider.

That's precisely why I created my first online discipleship course called **LIVING BY THE INDWELLING LIFE OF CHRIST**.

The course is a 10-audio program that comes with a workbook and a bonus resource.

Some of the other problems that are identified and solved in the course are:

1. Why do so many who teach discipleship fail to love other Christians, treating them the way they want to be treated in all circumstances? And how can this be overcome?
2. What is the best way to grow spiritually?
3. How does one *really* know the Lord in a deep and vibrant way?
4. What is the proper balance between good works and worship . . . between loving Jesus and serving Him?
5. What is transformation, really? And how does it occur?
6. What are the main community-destroyers and how can we prevent them?
7. What does it mean to lose, to die to self, and to lay things down?
8. What does it look like when a person is actually living by Christ's indwelling life?

And much more . . .

Here are testimonials from some who have gone through the course:

*"Living by the Indwelling Life of Christ by Frank Viola is more than study, more than facts, more than crossing off your spiritual to do list. It's the absolutely stunning life of Jesus imparted to you. If your heart's felt stale and you've lost your passion for life and Jesus, dive into this study and experience the renewal that only comes by encountering Jesus face to face." ~ **Mary DeMuth**, author of *The Wall Around Your Heart**

*"I've listened to enough of this course to tell you that Frank presents a beautiful and compelling vision of what it means to live in Christ while insightfully addressing one of the most significant challenges that confronts contemporary disciples: namely, the challenge of learning how to grow in Christ, not by relying on our own self-effort, but by yielding to the life of Christ within us while growing in the truth of who we already are in him. And it's a course that is as practically orientated as it is theologically informative. Judging from everything I've heard about it, people have found this course to be incredibly powerful, and in some cases, absolutely life-changing! ~ **Greg Boyd**, author of *The Myth of a Christian Nation**

“Ever been frustrated trying to live the Christian life? Check out this great new resource by my friend Frank Viola.” ~ **Tommy Tenney**, author of *The God Chasers*

“I recommend getting this resource. If you are looking for a closer walk with the Lord, I believe it will help.” ~ **Ray Edwards**, best-selling author and copywriter

“I heard all the messages for this course live and I recommend them to all organic churches and individual Christians who want to go deeper in the Lord.” ~ **Milt Rodriguez**, church planter and author.

So far, I've completed the first 4 sessions. There is so much to take in, so much I've never been taught in my 40 years as a Christian. I have repeated these first 4 lessons a couple of times already. What you are teaching reveals a longing in me to know more, to know Jesus more, to understand more. I am loving it! Your gift for teaching, revealing these concepts and making them so understandable, is awesome. ~ **Jerry**

“Super, extremely helpful! I believe this is what I was looking for all along, the practical outworking of living by the indwelling life. After the first message, something ‘went off’ in my spirit and I have been enjoying the Lord since. I am just on the 4th message, so I look forward to the rest. I am taking my time to listen to each message several times before moving on.” ~ **George**

“The course is absolutely life changing!” ~ **Amy**

“Amazed of the richness in God’s word.” ~ **Juan**

“The course is wonderful. I have listened to all 9 and plan to listen to them again and again. I love the practical exercises that you share. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for sharing your experiences. I’ve been listening to your audios (and I think I’ve read all your books) for a couple years now and the words you share are life to me. Thank you for allowing God to use you to glorify his Son and to show us the desire of His heart.” ~ **Carla**

“In this course you have taken much of those teachings on Christ and put them into a most practical, highly needed and tangible format. Thank you for this provision to help the Church grow and mature into the fullness of Christ.” ~ **Howard**”

I just completed message 3 of your course. So far it has been great. It is taking what I have learned of Christ up to this point in my life and expanding it to a new level.” ~ **Suzy**

“It is revelatory to me. I have told several of my friends about it already.” ~ **Claudia**

“What I love about this course is not just the truth being taught, but the practicality of it. The Holy Spirit becomes someone relatable and experiential and in a way that makes sense but still beautifully mysterious and amazing.” ~ **Tim**

“One word, Awesome!!!!!!” ~ **Rick**

“This course is a fresh new revelation of Jesus Christ and His life. It is like a juicy fruit exploding in my mouth . . . always looking for more and enjoying this ‘zoe’ life.” ~ **Michel**

“I had been waiting for the course since first hearing Indwelling Life (the first one) and I’ve found it great.” ~ **Irving**

“So much of my previous exposure to “deeper christian life” studies have come together in concert and harmony through this course – for it ties it all consistently into Christ. The Lord has used it to balance out (what I thought were competing) perspectives, in really complimentary ways.” ~ **Russ**

“I love how you have been presenting His indwelling life in the Scriptures. It has been so affirming and enlightening and helpful. I have recommended your course to the ladies in my Bible study groups.” ~ **Jan**

“The content of the course is valuable. I also like your lively presentation of the topic and the humor, as well as the humor of the church, where you delivered this series. It proves that Christianity and having fun go together.” ~ **Alois**

“The course goes beyond just bringing revelation because it puts us into practice. The material is so rich that I’m trying to pass everything I could grasp from it to my brothers in the Lord.” ~ **Eduardo**

“I love it!” ~ **Jennifer**

“I’m find it to be life-changing so far! Thanks!” ~ **David**

“I wish every Christian would get the course . . . it’s that good.” ~ **Tom**

“I love the course. Thanks for giving me new creative ways to experience the Lord. ~**Rex**

“I am loving the course – worth every penny. Thank you for facilitating this great, life-affirming teaching.” ~ **Dave**

Click the banner below for more information. Registration opens three times a year.

