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FOREWORD BY ROBERT E. COLEMAN

REPLICATE

**How to Create a Culture of
Disciple-Making Right Where You Are**

The Most Important Growth Metric

*Apply yourself wholly to the [Scriptures];
apply the [Scriptures] wholly to yourself.*

• J. A. BENGELL

One of the many jobs I (Robby) had before becoming a pastor was stockbroker “in training.” For six months, I worked for an investment banking firm while studying for the Series 7 test. During this same period, I got into a car accident, became hooked on pharmaceutical pain meds, lost everything, and eventually surrendered my life to Christ after a three-year downward spiral. All that to say, I failed the test by two points, which I believe ultimately saved my life.

But in the process, I learned the principle of stewardship. The broker’s job was to guide his or her clients to buy low and sell high. A high ROI (Return On Investment), is the end goal. No investor wants to break even or, worse, lose money.

The same goes for the Christian life. You may not play the stock market, but we all invest our time each day.

HOW WOULD YOU SPEND IT?

Let's say that I offer you \$86,400 today to spend on whatever you desire with one stipulation—you have to spend all the money today. What's left over will be lost forever: you cannot carry over today's money to tomorrow. Could you do it? Most likely you are nodding your head right now. "Of course, I could spend it." Amazon packages would be primed and ready for shipping—purses, video games, iPads, watches, cars, and clothes. You might even give a few bucks to charity. The list would be endless in your quest to spend every last penny you received.

After your spending frenzy, let's say I show up the next day with the same offer: "Here is another check for \$86,400 to spend on whatever you want. But the same stipulations apply. Whatever you fail to spend will be gone forever." Could you do it two days in a row? Of course you could. You wake up the next morning to new stock investments, cleared debt, increased retirement funds, and a replenished savings account.

God gives each one of us 86,400 seconds each day. We are free to spend them in whatever manner we wish. And when they're gone, they're gone. So what should we invest in?

In the most extensive discipleship study ever done to date, LifeWay Research shared its findings after a decade's worth of research. The scope of the project spanned eight countries with over 1,000 pastors and 4,000 Protestant believers in North America. Five discipleship insights rose to the top⁴:

- 1) Discipleship is intentional.**
- 2) Groups matter. A lot.**
- 3) Reading the Bible matters more than anything else.**

- 4) The discipline of Bible engagement impacts every other discipline.**
- 5) There is a deep connection between discipleship and evangelism.**

An increase in Bible engagement leads to increased participation in every other spiritual discipline. It is the most important growth metric of all. It's the tide that causes all the other ships to rise with it. Bible engagement leads to making disciples. As Eric Geiger writes, "A church can excel at anything and everything else, but if the church fails to make disciples, she has wandered from her fundamental reason for existence."⁵ C. S. Lewis said: "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them into little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose."⁶

READING THE WRONG WAY

After years of studying the Eastern culture that Jesus grew up in and comparing it to the Western culture we live in, I've made a startling discovery. I have been taught to misread the Bible. I would venture to say you are reading incorrectly as well. "Incorrectly" may be a strong word. I believe we have been reading the Bible one-dimensionally, which means we are missing out on the riches of God's truth in the sacred text. Michael Casey, in his book *Sacred Reading*, explains:

The reading of a scriptural book is a little like painting a wall. We accept in principle that it is something that

has to be done every few years; it can never be finished permanently. Probably we will use the occasion of repainting to change the color somewhat to correspond with current needs, and the result will create a new ambiance in which to live. Two or three coats of paint are necessary to ensure total coverage of the wall, and in the process of applying each coat we move back and forth, sometimes going over what has already been done, sometimes moving into new territory. A lot of repetition and overlap is needed to achieve a smooth finish, but when all is complete, only the harmony of the finished product is visible.⁷

Our goal shouldn't be to read through the Bible each year like we would a novel or nonfiction book. We might gain more knowledge about a book, but we probably won't develop more intimacy with a person. Our purpose should be to meet with God by slowing down and hearing His voice. Don't think linearly; instead, read circularly: going backward to move forward. By doing this, you provide a margin for the Holy Spirit to work as you read and meditate. "The sad truth," according to Ruth Barton, "is that many of us approach the Scriptures more like a textbook than like a love letter."⁸

Jewish rabbis taught similarly. They believed that rehearsing older lessons was just as important as, if not more important than, learning new ones. Jews read through the Torah day after day, year after year, repeating the words of God throughout their lives. They were in Scripture all the time, but their goals were typically different than ours. The Jewish Talmud says, "The [student] who reviews his studies one hundred times is not comparable to one who reviews his studies one hundred and one

times.”⁹ Jesus taught seven truths to the disciples throughout His earthly ministry over and over. John 17 records the seven practices Jesus repeatedly ingrained in the disciples’ minds:

John 17:6: Revelation

John 17:8: Information

John 17:9: Supplication

John 17:12: Protection

John 17:18: Mobilization

John 17:19: Sanctification

John 17:22: Replication

INTIMACY VS. INFORMATION

A popular delicacy in France is *pâté de foie gras*: the liver of a duck that has been fattened through force-feeding. The poor animal is forced to eat food by inserting a pole in its throat. A brass ring is fastened around its neck to keep the goose from regurgitating the food, trapping it in its digestive tract. The nutrient overload creates a fattened liver which is desired by chefs who prepare this dish the world over. The duck is never nourished from the food, only fattened to develop a stuffed liver to be served on a platter in the name of French cuisine. Like these ducks, many Christians have been force-fed study after study, and yet they are no more nourished than when they began. The goal is not just to learn more; it’s to live out what we know. It’s possible to be subjected to information but not affected by it.

Dave Browning, in *Deliberate Simplicity*, stated, “We are convinced that the gap holding back most believers is not the gap between what they know and what they don’t know. It’s the gap between what they know and what they’re living. Many

Christians are . . . educated beyond their obedience.”¹⁰ Most Christians do not need to attend another Bible study to grow in their relationship with the Lord. They need to start living what they have already learned.

Mark Twain has been attributed with saying, “Some people are troubled by the things in the Bible they can’t understand. The things that trouble me are the things I can understand.”¹¹ It’s not the things in the Bible that I don’t know that I have a problem with. It’s the commands in the Bible that I do understand that are most challenging: don’t lie, don’t lust, don’t hate, don’t cheat. Without connecting the dots of our reading through dialogue, discussion, and application, which only happens in a group setting, we are feeding people the Bible with very little digestion for nourishment. Reading without pondering, meditating, and marinating on a text produces consumers of information, not coworkers in ministry.

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