

## Discipleship Relationships

The goal of the discipling relationship is for each participant to become spiritually minded. As pastor and author John Piper says:

Being spiritually minded is a matter of life and death. Paul said in Romans 8:6, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but *to set the mind on the Spirit* is life and peace.” The phrase “set the mind on the Spirit” translates a noun phrase, *phronēma tou pneumatos*—“mindset of the Spirit.” There is no good one-word English equivalent for *phronēma*. It is not just “mind” but also “attitude.” And not just “mindset” but also “attitude-set.” It is the *frame* and *disposition* of our mind. To say that we have a “*phronēma* of the Spirit” is to say that the Spirit is shaping our mind-attitude-set according to his own. It exalts Christ and values God and cherishes the Word of God and sees people and things with a relentless God-consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

To become spiritually minded means to SEE, INTERPRET AND RESPOND TO THE SOVEREIGN CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE IN A WAY WHICH GLORIFIES THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND WHICH MAKES HIM MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO ARE NEAR. As a result, the participant’s life should increasingly become a product of God’s Word and God’s Spirit within, and less a product of genetics, upbringing, experiences, circumstances, treatment by others, moods, etc.

### Disciplined Listening

As human beings we live with a natural disposition to have a Pharisaical,<sup>2</sup> self-righteous, contemptuous attitude toward others.<sup>3</sup> One of the most glaring manifestations of this contempt toward others is our unwillingness to really listen to other people. Unfortunately we assume that we *do* listen! Current research seems to have stumbled upon what readers of God’s Word have known for thousands of years<sup>4</sup>—the average person does not take the time to listen, and lack of listening leads to devastated relationships and marriages, along with social and civil catastrophes.<sup>5</sup>

The significance of disciplined listening comes from the fact that the human “heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9). It deceives itself by its own nature and hides the deception from itself very well. At the same time, it is important to know our hearts because they reflect who we actually are (Prov. 27:19). The words we speak are a prime way our hearts are made manifest (Luke 6:45). Disciplined listening draws out the “deep waters” (Prov. 20:5) of a man’s heart, and builds a basis for true, deep, cleansing repentance which brings healing to a man’s body and soul (Ps. 32:3-6, James 5:16).

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<sup>1</sup> **How to be Spiritually Minded, John Piper,** [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1862\\_How\\_to\\_Be\\_Spiritually\\_Minded/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1862_How_to_Be_Spiritually_Minded/)

<sup>2</sup> **Obtain a free audio copy of “The Pharisee and the Publican” Luke 18:9-14 preached 11-15-06 by Jack Colwell, from Faith Community Church, Kansas City, Missouri. [www.faithcommunity.com](http://www.faithcommunity.com)**

<sup>3</sup> **Gen. 3:12, Matt. 18:1 & 28, Luke 18:9-14, 22:24, Romans chapters 1-3 [see especially 3:13] and chapter 7, James 3:2-5**

<sup>4</sup> **“Without good communication, relationships become combative and self centered, results implode, departments fail, people are fired, marriages end, children crash, companies dive, people die of loneliness, and nations collapse” (Lee, Gus, *Courage: The Backbone of Leadership*, Jossey-Bass 2006, pg. 77) The Space Shuttle disasters, the 1992 L.A. riots (50 killed, thousands injured and over one billion in property damage) and the worst aviation accident in history (Tenerife, Canary Islands; 578 people killed) were in great part caused or exacerbated by the lack of effective communication.**

<sup>5</sup> **Prov. 10:19, James 1: 19, 26, 3: 2-8**

For example, if a child explains why he hit his sibling by listing all the actions of his sibling that “made me mad,” it sounds like he is only telling on his sibling. We immediately want to interrupt and stop him. In reality he is revealing his own heart in:

- 1) How he sees life in a way that does not cause him to honor and thank God (Rom. 1:21ff).
- 2) What he loves more than God and others (Matt. 22:37-40), for example, the *toy* the other child grabbed from him.
- 3) How he erroneously holds the functional belief that fulfilling what *he* wants and needs is the goal of life (Matt. 22:37-39, Mark 9:35, 1 Cor. 10:31).

You could punish him and cause the child to change his behavior, but the sinful perspective of God, self and others may not have been affected (Matt. 5:21-24). The child may be well behaved, but still on the broad path that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14, Luke 18:9-14). How will you know unless you take the time to listen to and draw out the overflow of the heart?

Whenever someone talks to us, our minds were created to work rapidly to make connections, and to relate to what others are saying. The connections are made to past experiences and beliefs that make up the *construct of our own heart and mind*.<sup>6</sup> The instant our minds make connections, it causes us to “think” or assume we know what the speaker is going to say. This subconscious process is usually complete within a couple seconds or less.<sup>7</sup> In this instant we quit listening; begin to formulate our response and wait for an opportunity to interrupt, comment or interject.

Breaking this cycle requires maximum effort because it goes against how our minds are hard-wired. There are two ways to break this cycle: 1) Have a change of heart about the listening process; really believe that listening to another is an act of Christ honoring humility and a loving service to them (this is the ultimate goal). 2) Employ methods that permit true listening to take place, allowing you to see the spiritual power of ministry it holds, which in turn, God uses to manifest the change of heart noted (#1) to take place.

Since only God can change your heart towards others and give you intrinsic motivation to listen, here is a simple method to use in the mean time. Even while using this method, beseech God daily to give you a heart of love and compassion towards others that motivates you to listen. When you set out to engage in “disciplined listening” resist the temptation to interrupt with your own stories, experiences, assessments and assumptions. To draw out the deep waters of another’s heart, start with open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no response. Rather than asking, “Did you have a good day?” say, “Tell me about your devotion time this morning.” If what someone is telling you contains a lot of emotion or it is critical to knowing their heart, *briefly* say back to the other what you hear them saying, and/or, how they *seem* to feel about it. This will: 1) Keep you from hi-jacking the account of their heart and contaminating it by mixing in your own account. 2) Give them a chance to clarify any discrepancies between what they are intending to say and what you are hearing. So, in its simplest form, it might sound like: “When she said that, you felt hurt,” or “You feel upset because he ignored you,” or “You feel overwhelmed.” This can take many forms. There is no ‘magical’ formula, it is more important to keep you from hijacking their account and letting their heart manifest itself than to know exactly what to say. While this can seem awkward, if it is an expression of a loving and interested hearer, it will manifest grace. If you try this simple process, you will be amazed at what the lack of interruption and intermingling will draw out of their heart through their mouth. Having said

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<sup>6</sup> How we interpret our circumstances has more to do with *the construct of our own heart and mind* than with the reality of what is before us (refer back to the first section). See the appendix to this article for a brief Bible study on the importance of maintaining the construct of our own hearts and minds.

<sup>7</sup> While footnote 6 and the study in the appendix demonstrates the *result* of this phenomena, Malcolm Gladwell has documented the process of the phenomena from a secular point of view in his book *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, Little, Brown and Company, 2005.

this, we trust in God and not in means.<sup>8</sup> Remember, this process is only a temporary method to utilize as you develop the inner motivation and competence of disciplined listening.<sup>9</sup>

### Areas of Discipleship Accountability and Repentance<sup>10</sup>

**Hold one another accountable** to AUTHENTIC CHRIST-LIKENESS WITH SIMPLICITY OF CHARACTER. In other words, you are the same Christ-like person inside and outside regardless of circumstances or company—alone in front of a computer, with a disrespectful teenager, an unbelieving spouse, unfair co-workers, cheating sports players, walking by a magazine rack, selfish demanding children, a thoughtless spouse, in a store with a credit card or at church on Sunday.

**Hold one another accountable** to CONSISTENTLY EXHIBIT COURAGEOUS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, to all people and in all circumstances that God sovereignly brings your way. While this will never be *fully* realized this side of heaven, when by God’s grace we are successful we become a manifestation of the *grace of Christ* to those around us (John 15:12, Col. 1:24). When we fail, we confess and seek forgiveness and thus become a manifestation of the *gospel of Christ* (Matt. 5:23-24, 1 John 1:9). The LOVE OF CHRIST IS COURAGEOUS: “Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point” (*C.S. Lewis*). If another is caught in a sin, the love of Christ overcomes our natural fear and indifference (1 John 4:18-19) compelling us to go and seek restoration (Matt. 18, Gal. 6:1-2). The LOVE OF CHRIST IS FORGIVING (Matt. 18:21-35) it is patient and kind, it does not seek its own, it keeps no record of wrong, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4-6). While you listen to one another, expect to hear “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” sounds (in this case, speech which eloquently blames other people for our own unloving attitude and actions). *Do not interrupt*. Let the clanging reverberate so that when you eventually hold God’s Word up as a mirror, by God’s grace they will not walk away and forget what they saw, rather they will be blessed (James 1:23-25).

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<sup>8</sup> This sounds so simple. In principle it is. But in practice we sinners are wired to trust in means, not God. Over and over I devise plans, and then find my initial enthusiasm rise or fall as the plan seems smart or not. This is trust in plans, not trust in God. There is no doubt God wants us to use means to get his work done. But just as clearly he wants us not to trust in these means. “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD” (Proverbs 21:31). Therefore, our confidence should not be in the horse, but in the Lord. “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7). USE MEANS BUT DON’T TRUST IN MEANS, TRUST IN GOD  
By John Piper

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2004/1252\\_Use\\_Means\\_but\\_Dont\\_Trust\\_in\\_Means\\_Trust\\_in\\_God/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2004/1252_Use_Means_but_Dont_Trust_in_Means_Trust_in_God/)

<sup>9</sup> “Your job is to listen more. You don’t listen well. You don’t always have to respond.” Look at the Psalms. God doesn’t answer every verse. In a sense it’s David pouring out his heart. That’s it. In a sense the answers are already there, but the fact that God is present and is listening is His ministry. I’m simplifying theology. Ministry is listening, being present, and caring, being a refuge.” *Understanding Headship and Submission*, Winston Smith, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume 16, Number 2 Winter 1998

<sup>10</sup> Two things show us that repentance is an internal change of mind and heart rather than mere sorrow for sin or mere improvement of behavior. First, the meaning of the Greek word behind the English “repent” (metanoeo) points in this direction. It has two parts: meta and noeo. The second part (noeo) refers to the mind and its thoughts and perceptions and dispositions and purposes. The first part (meta) is a prefix that regularly means movement or change. So the basic meaning of repent is to experience a change of the mind’s perceptions and dispositions and purposes.

Thoughts on Jesus' Demand to Repent, Letters from Cambridge #2, John Piper,

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1780\\_Thoughts\\_on\\_Jesus\\_Demand\\_to\\_Repent/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1780_Thoughts_on_Jesus_Demand_to_Repent/)

**Hold one another accountable** to BREAK SINFUL PATTERNS. For example, here are some questions that one who has struggled with being a sluggard might be asked to respond to:

- In what ways have you overcome obstacles this week; or, you have let them overcome you? (Prov. 26:13)
- List ways in which you made excuses or accomplishments (Prov. 26:13).
- In what ways have you manifested an understanding that almost every believer must work for, and submit to, ungodly employers with unreasonable expectations; that God works through this to accomplish His purpose in your life, and you avoid it to your own harm? (Eph. 6:5-8, Col. 3:22-24)
- How have you been diligent in promptly accomplishing your basic responsibilities? (Prov. 24:30-34, 26:15)
- List ways that you sought out and submitted yourself to the constructive criticism of others such as your spouse or wise believers God has close to you (Prov. 26:16).
- Give examples of how your use of time this week is a result of intentional application of principles from God's Word NOT reacting to circumstances as they occur.
- Give examples of how your spouse, or others who have depended upon you have been, or not been, disappointed this week (Prov. 10:26).
- List principles you have learned this week from those who are godly, content and productive (Prov. 6:6, 13:4, 1 Tim. 6:6).
- When you have failed at the above principles, what ungodly desires have controlled you? (Prov. 21:25)

**Hold one another accountable** to 'reasonably' ENGAGE IN THE MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION that God has given His people.

- Being in consistent fellowship at Church, to include worship, a close discipleship/accountability relationship, small group fellowship, (and to the extent reasonably possible) Sunday school and corporate prayer times.
- Regular study, memorization, meditation and obedience to God's Word.
- A life increasingly devoted to the Spiritual Disciplines.<sup>11</sup>

**Hold one another accountable** to be a GOOD STEWARD OF THEIR BODY, taking care of it by regular comprehensive check-ups by a physician, along with appropriate diet, exercise, rest and relaxation.

**Hold one another accountable** to be a GOOD STEWARD OF TIME, by making sure that the previously listed areas of accountability are never subservient to less important activities. While some amusement is a good thing, every good thing, outside of Christ, can become a bad thing: Food—gluttony, Rest—laziness, Work—workaholic, etc. In the same manner, over-indulgence in time-wasting activities (like T.V., internet surfing, novel reading, computer gaming, etc.) must be avoided. Also, we must not allow our lives to be controlled by urgent circumstances so that important concerns such as courageous love, basic responsibilities to family and spiritual disciplines are compromised.

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<sup>11</sup> Obtain: ***SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE***; By Donald S. Whitney  
ISBN 1-57683-027-6

### **Other accountability / repentance questions**

- Describe ways in which you thirst for God.
- How does God's Word increasingly govern your life?
- Give an example of how you are more loving to the ones who most challenge you.
- Discuss ways in which you are more sensitive to God's presence.
- Explain how you have a growing concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others.
- How do you delight in the Bride of Christ?
- Give examples of how the spiritual disciplines are becoming increasingly important to you.
- Do you still grieve over your sin?
- How are you manifesting the forgiveness of Christ to others?
- Discuss how you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from *TEN QUESTIONS TO DIAGNOSE YOUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH* Donald S. Whitney  
ISBN: 1576830969, NavPress, 2001

## Appendix: Bible Study on a Spiritual Mindset

How we interpret our circumstances has more to do with the construct of our own heart and mind than with the reality of what is before us. This is clearly seen in the account of Goliath (1 Sam. 17). Read the account and ask yourself the following questions:

- What did the armies of Israel *see* when they saw Goliath?
- What did David *see* when he saw Goliath?

The text gives several clues as to why, even though the *external* situation they saw was identical, what they saw *internally* was entirely different. Compare/contrast the Goliath incident with the account of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) along with Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39).

- What did David see when he saw Bathsheba?
- What did Joseph see when he saw Potiphar's wife?
- Examine the texts for clues as to what so drastically changed David's perspective and what protected Joseph's perspective.

To further demonstrate the importance of maintaining the construct of our own hearts and minds read Romans 8:6 and Col. 3:2 and then answer these questions about David and Joseph:

- Who had greater knowledge of Scripture, David or Joseph?
- Whose temptation was far off and who was "caught by his garment?"
- Who had a longer track record and maturity of walking with the Lord?
- Did David or Joseph have others around them to whom they could have gone to ask to be encouraged in the faith?

- Who faced negative consequences only if they said “no” to the temptation, and who faced negative consequences only if they said “yes”?
- Who had been abandoned, and who was occupying a palace filled with wives and concubines when the temptation came?

In other words, David had everything going for him and Joseph had everything against him. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE WAS THE CONSTRUCT OF THEIR OWN HEART AND MIND, WHICH SET THE CONTEXT OF HOW THEY SAW THE CIRCUMSTANCE!

Again, read Numbers 13 regarding the report of the spies.

- Did all twelve spies see the exact thing *externally*?
- Why did two of the spies see something *internally* that was completely different from the other ten?

That is why *any circumstance* could potentially produce the “Fruit of the Spirit” or “Deeds of the Flesh” (Gal. 5). It is a result of the internal construct of the heart and mind *not* the external circumstances (Prov. 23:6-8).

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