

The Environmental Conditions for Transformation

By Greg Ogden

Let me tell you the story of Eric's transformation, one of my first two recruits on this discipleship adventure. Eric actually approached me stating his interest in some type of mentoring relationship. In retrospect, because of Eric's spiritual ambivalence at the time, he was probably not the best candidate for an intensive relationship. He was two years out of college with the world by the tail. Looking like a fashion model who walked straight out of the pages of men's clothing catalogue, Eric was the envy of his male friends. Because of his chiseled good looks, attracting women was the least of his problems. He was making more money than he ever dreamed with a most promising future with his new company. All of this was very alluring.

In spite of the world's draw, Eric had also a strong pull toward following Christ. It was all a matter of who was going to win--Jesus or the world. There was an evident tug of war going on within. I mentioned to him that I had written this new curriculum and was eager to have some guinea pigs to try it out. I made sure that he knew that this was not going to be a "walk-in-the-park". To be involved in this relationship was to require an intense investment including a study of Scripture topically and its application to daily life, memorization of Bible verses, and transparent interaction with me and one other. The high bar was set, yet Eric said he was willing to give it a go.

A restaurant located equidistant from our work places became our rendezvous for our triad. Over lunch we laid out our open Bibles and study materials on the restaurant table and proceeded to interact over the content. The relationship in this three-some clicked almost immediately. What impressed me was the energetic interchange in our conversation. There was something about adding a third party to the one-on-one that made it come alive. Even though I was the pastor among the three, I didn't sense that I had to be the focal point or the ever flowing fountain of wisdom. I could enter in freely without feeling on the spot. It turned into a peer discipling relationship where we each out of our particular journeys of faith could honestly share our insights into the Word and its application to our current life situation.

Eric was quite open about his divided heart. He was a fence sitter when it came to selling out to Jesus Christ. The enticement to a life of comfort, and serial female relationships seemed quite tempting. He related to us the story of making eye contact with a very attractive female motorist, while driving through the busy Los Angeles traffic. The next thing he knew they had pulled off on a side street to exchange phone numbers. Quite frankly the two of us listened to the story with more than a bit of envy, without any comparable stories to tell. Yet we also understood how seductive this sexual power could be for Eric. It was the very fault line that was creating a fissure in his heart.

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Yet Eric could not get a way from the magnetic appeal of Jesus Christ. There was something about the power of the person of Jesus and the life of adventure to which He was called us that would not allow him to shake him off. In our second lesson we explored Jesus' normative standard for all who would follow him. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me. For he who would save his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake and the gospel, will find it." (Luke 9:23, 24) Eric was faced with the same choice Moses posed to the people of Israel, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity...Choose life." (Deut. 30:15, 20) The choice before Eric was that clear.

It was not too many weeks into our time together that Eric announced that he was going quit his job and see the world. He wanted to take the better part of a year for a freelance exploration of this planet. In his young, carefree, and unattached years, he wanted to do what he might not be able to do later when more responsibilities might weigh upon him. He reasoned that he could always get a job when he returned, but this stage of his life would only come around once. This decision precipitated some very intense discussion. It was evident that Eric was drifting into a life of self-absorption. I was searching for a way to "speak into" this carefree attitude. I said, "Eric, at least consider taking a month or two of this time to invest somewhere in a mission opportunity. Pause long enough to immerse yourself in God's work in your travels and rub shoulders with quality Christian people who are giving themselves away for the sake of the gospel."

I don't remember the exact sequence of events or steps in the shift, but before I knew it, not only was Eric going to take some time out of his world tour to be invested in Christian mission, he decided to abandon his vagabond activities all together. In place of his wanderlust he had signed on for a summer mission opportunity with Campus Crusade for Christ in Hungary and Poland. This was prior to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. I have often reflected on the power of being able to speak a word of truth or challenge into a life. If we had not had the regularity of relationship and the trust that had been built in these few months, I doubt that Eric would have had a context in which to hear a confrontive word that had the potential to redirect his life.

When Eric returned that summer from his surreptitious adventures, he was a transformed individual. The divided heart had been totally subsumed under the Lordship of Jesus. He regaled us with stories of sharing the gospel on the lakeside beaches of Hungary, and clandestine forays into the then closed and dangerous Poland. People were hungry for the good news, and he saw Jesus Christ grab a hold of and redirect lives.

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Upon his return he immediately went onto Campus Crusade staff with the intent of taking business people into the Eastern block countries in order to crack open their hearts to the work of the transformative gospel in these barricaded regions. At the same time Eric reconnected with a high school sweetheart, who also was a passionate follower of Jesus. It seemed only a matter of months before they were engaged and Betsy was ready join Crusade staff along with Eric. These two lit up rooms with their radiant joy in service to Christ and their love for each other. They honored me by asking if I would perform their wedding in Portland, Oregon alongside Betsy's pastor.

A number of weeks prior to the wedding, Eric was experiencing debilitating back pain. He assumed that the cause of the pain was a recent motorcycle accident. The trouble was that even with physical therapy, he was showing no improvement. On the Monday prior to the Saturday of their wedding a tumor was discovered pressing up against Eric's spine. Testicular cancer had spread to multiple parts of his body. The prognosis was not good. He was admitted that very day to the hospital and began a heavy regimen of chemotherapy.

Eric and Betsy's spirits were undaunted. The wedding would go on. There needed to be a quick change in the venue. The church wedding was off, but the hospital chapel could hold a standing room only crowd. Eric's hospital bed was rolled into chapel. The scene was something you might see in a made for TV movie that was designed to manipulate emotions. But this was real life. Eric was propped up in his bed, inclined at almost a ninety-degree angle. The covers came up to his waist, with his upper torso appropriately dressed in his tuxedo. Betsy, his bride, stood bedside holding Eric's hand with her right hand and her bouquet with the other. The wedding party flanked the bed on either side. There is usually a lot of anticipation at weddings, but never has the air been as thick with lump-in-the-throat emotions as this packed chapel. Sixteen years after this event, I have no trouble remembering the thickness in my windpipe and the struggle to read my notes through my blurred and misty eyes.

The ensuing months were a roller coaster ride. The chemotherapy took a toll on this handsome hunk. In some of his better days, Eric was able to travel. I still have vivid images of his walking into our Southern California church with his knit cap covering his billiard ball head and looking very gaunt. Yet his spirit could not be beaten. He radiated the love of Jesus Christ. I knew that this was a man living the words of the apostle Paul, "So we do not lose heart. Even though outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16).

When Eric had to go back into the hospital for further treatments I flew to Oregon to pay him a visit. As I walking toward Eric's hospital room, some of his

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delayed adolescent former high school buddies were leaving. These young men, who could normally make light of anything, were unusually sullen. They said to me, "You know what Eric said. He said that cancer was the best thing that ever happened to him. Can you believe that?" Eric would have obviously preferred it otherwise, but he had come to cast his entire hope upon Jesus Christ, and His Lord and Lover had not let him down.

Let Eric tell his discoveries in his own words, "God is helping me grow closer to Him. It [the cancer] has made me realize who I have to depend on. And I have seen through these experiences that when I do call upon God that He really helps in His way. It may not mean that He will relieve the pain or that He will cure the cancer immediately. It may mean that I die, or live...that does not matter. What is important is that I keep my eyes on him.

A short seven months after his marriage to Betsy, Eric died on April 25, 1986, at the age of 25. Here was a man who in a short period of time went from ambivalence about following Jesus Christ to wholehearted trust and devotion.

In other words, Eric was **transformed**. Transformation is the focus of this teaching.

If this is a life-long process, what are conditions that create the environment for truly letting go of the old and putting on the new?

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Without question the setting where I have experienced the most accelerated transformation in the lives of believers has been in triads/quads or small reproducible discipleship groups. I call them the "hot-house" of Christian growth. Hot houses maximize the environmental conditions so that living things can grow at a rate greater than would exist under normal circumstances. In a recent trip to Alaska my wife and I heard stories of 500-pound pumpkins, and zucchinis the length of baseball bats. We gaped at daffodils the size of dinner plates. During the summer months in Alaska the sun almost never ceases to shine. Though the growing season is quite short (May through August), the conditions are ripe for accelerated growth. This is what happens in a triad. Progress in living the Christian life up may have been steady and incremental throughout a believer's life, and then all of a sudden it moves to warp speed in a discipleship group.

Why is this? What are the climatic conditions in a discipleship group of three or four that create the hothouse effect? There are three ingredients when exercised in a balanced way that release the Holy Spirit to bring about a rapid growth toward Christlikeness: This can be summarized in the following Biblical

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principle: *When we (1) open our hearts in **transparent trust** to each other (2) around the **truth** of God's word (3) in the spirit of **life-change accountability**, we are in the Holy Spirit's hothouse of transformation.*

Let's look at what is contained in each of these three environmental elements that makes for accelerated growth and reproduction:

Climatic Condition #1—Transparent Trust

Intimate, accountable relationships with other believers is the foundation for growing in discipleship. But what kind of relationship? The atmosphere to be fostered in a triad is an ever-increasing openness and transparency between one another. Why is this a necessary condition for change? ***The extent to which we are willing to reveal to others those areas of our life that need God's transforming touch is the extent to which we are inviting the Holy Spirit to make us new.*** Our willingness to enter into horizontal or relational intimacy is a statement of our true desire before God of our willingness to invite the Lord to do His makeover in our life.

You could offer a rebuttal to this relational challenge by saying that you already have a transparently honest relationship with God. Your life is an open book to the Lord. I have nothing to hide, you might say. In your relationship with the Lord you regularly invite the Lord to expose the secrets of your heart and you hold nothing back from his piercing gaze. Therefore it is nobody else's business what my struggles are with my dark side along as I am not deceiving God.

Therein lies the problem. Deception. I would counter that human beings have an almost infinite capacity for self-deception and self-justification. The prophet Jeremiah captured the mystery of the human heart, ***"The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it"*** (Jer. 17:9).

The IRS received the following note: ***"Gentlemen: Enclosed you will find a check for \$150. I cheated on my income tax return last year and have not been able to sleep every since. If I still have trouble sleeping I will send you the rest. Sincerely,"***¹ This man was willing to be honest up to a point... just enough to help him sleep. What we say we can handle between ourselves and God, most often we cannot. We minimize those areas of our life which continuously thwart us by tending to dupe ourselves into thinking that with a little more effort I will stop that behavior or pattern of thought this time, or if I ask God for forgiveness just this one last time, then I will stop. As long as the struggles in our Christian

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Come Before Winter* (Portland OR: Multnomah Press, 1985), 91.

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growth remain locked inside our spirit only known to God, then patterns or strongholds of besetting sin will defeat us.

The small size of a triad says that this is going to be intimate. There is no place to hide with three people. A three-some is to be an exploration of intimate community that fosters trust and in so doing creates the context to assist each other in Christian growth. Though I have already jumped into the deep end of the pool by hinting that mutual confession is the ultimate destination for the kind of intimacy that is necessary for transformation, let me suspend discussion on this aspect of transparency until later. I will get back to this subject and make a case for it being the missing ingredient in our transformation process in the church today. But before we are ready for the deep end of the pool, transparent trust is built by wading slowly into the shallow end to see if the waters are safe.

Men vs. Women

Self-disclosure comes in direct proportion to the trust we sense with our discipleship partners. For men this is particularly difficult. It is been broadly observed that women share their intimate stuff and feelings a lot more readily than. 6 out of 10 women say that have a friendship is which they can be almost completely honest. Only 2 out of 10 men say the same, and they are lying. Men have acquaintances; buddies with whom we do things, but not too many have people with whom we can be transparent and accepted.

A generation ago John Powell wrote a little book with the provocative title, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* His answer: "Because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and it's all that I have."² Fear of personal rejection or condemnation lurks inside of us all. To the extent that we can find a safe place to be who we are "warts and all", then we are free to discover that unique creation waiting to be fully unleashed.

What are the elements of transparent trust that will allow us to move gradually into the deep waters of transformation?

- Affirming one another through encouragement
- Walking with one another through difficult circumstances
- Being a reflective voice that assists one another to clarify God's guidance in life's complexities
- Confessing our sins to one another that we may be healed

Affirmation Through Encouragement

² John Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* (Thomas More Publishing, 1995, Reprint Edition)

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In essence, the people with whom we share the discipleship journey need to convey the attitude of unqualified desire that we be all that God intended us to be, primarily through the affirmation of our uniqueness and value to the Lord. Jesus began his public ministry with this affirmation of His father, **"You are my Son, marked and chosen by my love, pride of my life"** (Mark 1:11, *The Message*). This is the same message that we need to convey to one another.

Gordon McDonald in his book *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* comments on the cleansing and purifying power of rebuke by saying, **"One solid and loving rebuke is worth a hundred affirmations."**³ I have often turned the intent of that statement around and focused on the affirmations by saying, **"A hundred affirmations for every rebuke is just about the right ratio."** The problem is that most of us are not living with a hundred words of encouragement to every word of correction. Prior to entering the sanctuary for public worship some time ago, I ducked into the restroom. Standing side by side at the sink was one of the singers who often performs solos as well as participates in worship leadership with our worship band. I took the opportunity to say, **"Chris, I just want to thank you for the way you bless us in worship. When you sing it is obvious that it is to the Lord and your singing takes me to the place of praise where I need to be. The Lord bless you for what you do for us as a worshipping community."** You would have thought that I told him he had won the lottery. With emotion he said, **"Thank you sooooo much. You have just made my day!"**

We are starving for honest and meaningful affirmation in a world that knows better how to beat us up, than build us up. In the intimacy of a triad we have the opportunity to observe the formation of the unique creations God has made each other to be and to affirm what God is birthing.

Walking With Each Other in Difficult Circumstances

When you enter a covenantal relationship that will stay together for the better part of a year or longer, you can bet that you will have the opportunity to address life's high and lows. Paul states the rhythm of relationships in the body, **"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together"** (I Cor. 12:26). This is especially true in a triad. The nature of life is that there are circumstances over which we have no control that can have a devastating impact upon us. One of the privileges of this intimate relationship is to be able walk with one another when life goes south. Paul encourages the Thessalonians with these words: **"Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore what is lacking in your faith"** (I Thes.

³ Gordon McDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 191.

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3:10). We learn trust through the faithfulness of partners who sustain us in times when the bottom has fallen out.

Being carried by the faith of others is often the way to learn to trust God. I have often said to people whose life has come crashing down, "Let my faith carry you for a while. Some day you will be in a position to return the favor." This is exactly what discipleship groups can do as it builds toward transparent trust.

Being A Reflective Voice To Hear God's Guidance In Life's Complexities

Being reflective listeners is not easy for us as men. All of us think of ourselves as good listeners, right? Wrong? I have been with a new group of three of the men the last 10 weeks or so. I have been watching carefully the pattern of communication. These men don't know how to listen. We will risk with each other to the extent that we are tended to. I have had enough this last Wednesday morning. One of the men was sharing that after 26 years of living in the same location, he and his wife were feeling a nudge from the Lord to sell their house and begin an adventure of following Jesus in a less encumbered way. This particular individual, in his early 50's, retired now from the fire department has a sense that he is making up for lost time. For the past 25 years, the Lord did not have his attention. He was immersed more in his career than the Lord or his family. The other two men, did not seem to know how to stay with the deep stuff that Mark was letting us in on. I broke in a said, after two deflecting comments were made. "If we are going to develop trust, we must convey to Mark we want to go deeper with him; to hear with him what the Lord is saying to him. Follow up; ask questions; become discerning ears along with his."

Scott is a high school art teacher, who loves to coach football on the side. True, this is not your usual combination. When I invited Scott to join a triad, he was still reeling from the sting of having been released as the Frosh-Soph coach of the high school team by an apparently jealous and threatened Athletic Director. Scott's teams had gone undefeated while the Varsity was not fairing as well under the Athletic Director. As I listened to Scott share his pain about this dismissal, it was obvious that there was a hole in his heart. He was wired to invest in kids as a coach. This was God's call upon his life. Yet Scott was trying to do the balancing act that all busy and capable people must do. He was married with three children ranging from the teens to infancy (oops). He was also a conscientious teacher, whose job never ends. In addition, he also had been asked to serve as an elder at the church, of which I was pastor. This was a role for which Scott was eminently qualified and frankly I drooled at the possibility of having him on my team.

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Yet there was something obviously missing in Scott's life. Scott was torn between the "shoulds" of his life and this call to coach. He missed the investment in these young lives; the opportunity to influence and disciple them toward godly character; the team spirit and to work for goals that only could be accomplished together. The Athletic Director, now a little more mature and secure, had seen his error and asked Scott again to become the Frosh-Soph football coach. Scott was reticent. He wasn't sure he wanted to set himself up to be hurt again. Then there was issue of pride. Did he really want to give this man the satisfaction of Scott saying, "Yes." Time would not permit Scott to be both an elder in the church and the coach of a football team. The "should" from the church was clashing with the call of God. What a joy it was for me to help Scott see how God had wired to serve him. The call of God on Scott was to invest in the lives of these kids and families at this juncture of his and their journey. The call to be an elder could wait. As the senior pastor of the church, this was unusual direction for me to be steering Scott. Sheer self-interest said that I would love to have a man of Scott's ability and godly character as a partner in church leadership. Yet for those of us in the triad our responsibility was to help Scott become aware of the hand of God upon his life. He chose coaching.

Confession of Sin and Addressing the Addictions of the Heart

The deep end of the pool of transparent trust is the water of mutual confession of sin and addiction. To get to the deep end we must go through the shallower waters of the affirmation of encouragement, support through life's difficulties, and prayerful listening in order to help our partners hear God's voice in life's decisions. Only then are we likely to venture in over our heads by confessing our patterns of besetting sin to one another.

My experience tells me that few believers either have the regular habit or the safe context in which we can reveal to another human being what lurks inside the recesses of our hearts. Until we get to point where we can articulate to another those things that have a hold on us, then we will live under the tyranny of our own darkness. James admonished his readers, "**Confess your sins to another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed**" (James 5:16). James makes a direct connection between confession and healing. In this context healing appears to be of a physical nature. Yet James believed that the health of one's spirit directly affected the health of one's body. Much bodily illness is related to spiritual or emotional sickness. Modern psychology would certainly agree. If transformation into Christlikeness is related to being free from the darkness that can drag us down, then confession is a necessary means to free us from the bondage to sin and addiction.

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What is the connection between confession and freedom? Bringing the shame of our guilt into the light before trusted members of the body of Christ can in itself have a liberating effect. Once something is admitted before others, it begins to lose its power to control. Sin loves the darkness, but its power weakens in the light.

Mutual confession is a major missing ingredient today in the process of Christlike transformation.

To learn to swim in the deep waters of transparent trust is a necessary element for accelerated growth in the Christian. Learning to swim can be a scary experience, especially when you are over your head. But once you learn to trust the water to hold you up, you can relax and experience its refreshment. Relational transparency is a necessary condition for transformation.

Climatic Condition #2 Truth in Community

The second of three environmental elements that create the conditions for the hothouse of accelerated growth is **the truth of God's word**. Why is this? There is no better summary of both the nature and the value of the word of God than Paul's statement to his son in the faith, Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient for every good work" (II Tim. 4:16, 17).

It is particularly important in our day that a disciple has the opportunity to cover the essential teachings of the Christian life in a systematic and sequential fashion. We are living at a time when the average person has little memory of the Christian faith. A generation ago I recall clearly the warnings of Francis Schaeffer and Elton Trueblood, who said that we were one generation away from losing the memory of Christian faith in our culture. They underscored that this by prophetically saying that we were living in a "cut flower" society. This is a graphic image. When you cut a flower from its roots and place it in a vase, it can still look healthy for a short period of time, but then it droops. Our culture, they said, has been severed from its Judeo-Christian roots. They warned that we were then living off of a memory that would vanish by the next generation. We are that next generation!

The Tonight Show with Jay Leno is an unlikely place to find evidence for this loss of memory. One night Leno took to the streets with microphone in hand asking people questions about their biblical knowledge. He approached two college-age women with the question, "Can you name one of the Ten

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Commandments?" Quizzical and blank looks led to this reply, "Freedom of speech?" Then Leno turned to a young man, "Who according to the Bible was eaten by a whale?" With confidence and excitement, he blurted out, "I know, I know, Pinnochio!" The memory of Christianity has been lost.

One of the participants in a discipling triad that I led was a woman about ten years my senior who had been raised in the home of a congregational pastor. After we had completed our time together, she said to me, "Greg, I have something to confess. When you asked me to join this group, I didn't think I had a whole lot to learn. After all I had been studying the Scriptures all of my life having been raised in a home where the Bible was central. But I discovered as we covered the faith in a systematic and sequential order, that my understanding was much like a *mosaic*. I had clusters of tiles with a lot of empty spaces in between. This approach has allowed me to fill in all those places where tiles belong. I now see in a comprehensive fashion how the Christian faith makes sense of it all." The Scripture is profitable for...teaching.

Climatic Condition #3 Mutual Accountability

The third environmental element that will contribute to creating just the right climatic conditions for accelerated growth is **mutual accountability**. In other words, the relationship between those on the discipleship journey together is covenantal. What is a covenant? **A covenant is written, mutual agreement between 2 or more parties that clearly states the expectations and commitments in the relationship.** Implied in this definition is that the covenantal partners are giving each other authority to hold them to the covenant to which they have all agreed. Accountability has then been defined as "a willing decision to abide by certain standards and a voluntary submission of oneself to a review by others in which one's performance is evaluated in light of these standards."

Here is the rub. To willingly give others authority to hold us to account to what we said we would do is for most Westerners a violation of what we hold most dear. I referenced earlier Robert Bellah's study on the search for the core of the American character recorded in his ground-breaking book, Habits of the Heart. He found that freedom from obligation defined the center of what it is to be an American. Raised as we have been with the spirit of radical independence, almost everything in us rebels against mutual submission. We want to keep our own counsel. We want to be in control of our own choices, life direction, character formation, schedules, etc. Now you are telling me that mutual accountability is a necessary ingredient to transformation in Christ.

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In conclusion, what setting incorporates relational transparency, truth in community, and mutual accountability? It is the small group. The early church met in homes, which could not hold more than 10 to 12 people. Our vision of discipleship here at CCOB is built around the belief that transformation happens in contexts where apprentices journey together in little platoons. I see small groups of 10 to 12 meeting in homes, perhaps in geographical areas with trained lay leaders or shepherds guiding people into the kind of community just described and pictured in Acts 2. This congregation would practice the rhythm of centralized, formal worship and decentralized, informal relational groups so that we would be a *place where no one stands alone*. Many of you I know are already connected in group life. Over the next few weeks we are going to ask you to tell us about the groups that are already meeting, so that we have a sense of what is already happening along these lines.

As a concluding story, it is fortuitous that the cover story of this week's Newsweek Magazine was ***Bush and God***. Howard Fineman tells the story of how the Lord used the small group to shape the President's faith. Some of you might say that the Lord has got a lot more work to do. It is well known that the turning point of President Bush's life came in a crisis of facing up to his drinking problem. Donald Evans, Secretary of Commerce, invited Bush to a program called, *Community Bible Study*. Fineman describes it as a scriptural boot camp. Fineman writes, *"that it gave him for the first time, an intellectual focus. He was for the first time reading a book line by line with rapt attention. And it was...the Bible. A jogger and marathoner for years, Bush found in Bible study an equivalent mental and spiritual discipline, which he would soon need to steel himself for his main challenge in his life to that point: to quit drinking. Community Bible Study was...part of what has since come to be called the 'small group' movement."* Truth in community. He experienced all the elements we have been talking about this morning, relational transparency, truth in community, and life-change accountability.

Accountability brings us back to the very core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is one under authority. A disciple of Jesus is one who does not leave any doubt that it is Jesus who is exerting the formative influence over our lives. Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23) The way to get serious about this truth is to practice coming under authority in our covenantal relationships in Christ.

Conclusion:

Jesus invited 12 to be "with him". Why? Disciples can't be made in a crowd. He called the 12 out of the crowd. Crowds are anonymous. It requires no commitment to be in a crowd. You can be positively or

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favorable disposed. But you are an observer. You are a spectator, but have jumped onto the playing field. It has been observed that the church today is a lot like a football game. Thousands of people in the stand in desperate need of exercise, watching 22 people on the field in desperate need of rest. Gatherings like this are wonderful, but if that is all that you do you are still spectators. Come out of the crowd, on to the playing, get serious and invest yourself in a few who really want to go somewhere.

Leaving a Legacy

One of the most deflating moments for the United States in the history of the Olympic games occurred in 1988 in Seoul, Korea. The American 4 X 100 relay team was poised to break the world record and assume its position as the world's best. It had peerless athletes. There was no thought that this team could lose. The only question was would they crack the world record. Yet as the final leg of the race approached, the unthinkable happened. The Americans dropped the baton. The hand off was not completed. In an instant, the race was over. The crowd, electrified moments earlier, were left in stunned silence. They had relied on their inherent speed and failed to sufficiently practice the hand-off that was so crucial for the completion of the race.

"Every Christian must see themselves as the link to the next generation," say William Barclay. We need to practice the hand-off. When all else fails, read the directions. It is not that Jesus' Way has been tried and found wanting, and it has been largely talked about, but not implemented. Return to small, reproducible, long-term relationships as the means of transmission of the gospel from one generation to the next.

Legacies are not about leaving large sums of money to our children nor being immortalized in stone by getting our names etched on a building. When we get to the shore's edge and know that there is a boat there waiting to take us to the other side to be with Jesus, all that will truly matter is...the names of family, friends and others who are self initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus because we made it the priority of our lives to walk with them toward maturity in Christ. There is no better eternal investment or legacy to leave behind.

This sentiment is captured well in the anonymous poem...

The Bridge Builder

An old man, going a lone highway,
Came at evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.

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The old man crossed the twilight dim—
That sullen stream had no fears of him;
But he turned, when he had reached the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting strength building here.
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again will pass this way.
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build up the bridge at the eventide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head.
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said.
“There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may be a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bride for him.”