

SHIFT 5

from “inviting to” to “inviting along”

We are only able to understand what someone is communicating to us by using the way of thinking and understanding that comes naturally to us. We process through our current paradigm, not the paradigm of the person proposing something to us. Such is the case with the content of this book.

If the form of “discipleship” you have known is information driven and delivered through church programs, then it may be difficult for you to hear what I am saying. You may have to do some work to adjust your own framework in order to understand it. That’s why relationship is so important, because in the context of a relationship, we can clarify what we mean. Since we cannot meet face to face, I want to clarify my message in this closing chapter by describing the paradigm of “inviting along.”

If you were “invited to” discipleship classes or groups, chances are your disciple-making efforts have mirrored the way you were discipled. In this model, disciple making is done at an event, in a church building, or through a Bible study—none of which are “bad”

or “wrong.” In fact, those things can be part of a disciple-making relationship. But too often those things are the full extent of disciple-making relationships, which really aren’t very relational at all, if we are to be honest.

Whether or not your local church functions like a family, you can make the shift from “inviting to” to “inviting along.” And you will never want to go back to the ways of “inviting to” once this happens. Let me explain.

The “invite to” way of discipleship usually involves a once-a-week interaction with a lot of people around a common topic. Again, this is not bad or wrong. But contrast this with the “invite along” way of disciple making, which usually involves interacting multiple times a week with a few people in common habits of everyday life. This is for those who already believe and for those who have yet to believe, so they can see the ups and downs of each other’s lives, encourage and sharpen one another, and experience the challenging and beautiful aspects of each person’s life. This means eating together, serving together, Sabbathng together, and learning together (more on these below). We share projects, priorities, and plans, and we enjoy them together. We have fights and make mistakes and offer forgiveness. We share conversations that cover multiple topics, and the Gospel flows into them rather than being forced on them.

The “invite to” way of discipleship usually involves acquaintances, and the relationships of these acquaintances are usually limited by the beginning and end date of a program, class, or group. There are exceptions to this because some people who meet in these contexts realize they have common interests. But more often than not, our “invite to” church commitments severely limit the commitment we can make to one another in family-like relationships.

Contrast this again with the “invite along” way of disciple making. This way equips the church for an hour—usually on Sunday morning but not always—to encourage and care for one another. Then, we go back out into the other 167 hours of the week to live on mission where we live, work, school, rest, and play. Most of the time we as believers partner together with a few others we live or work with, and there is a family-like group consistently doing life together. The friendships we have developed with those who welcome us into their lives are woven together into the life we share with other believers. Friendships endure over the course of these “invite along” rhythms, possibly moving along a disciple-making spectrum as diverse as these descriptions:

- Not-yet believing
- Newly believing
- Inviting along others into the family of believers
- Maturing while multiplying
- Encouraging and coaching other disciple makers
- Pairing up with several other believers and not-yet believers to form a new group
- Joining together with other family-like groups to form a new community of faith
- Being sent into the nations of the world to live this “invite along” disciple-making way

This “invite along” way does not limit friendships because there aren’t numerous church schedule commitments that distract people from “being the church.” And like Jesus focused on The Twelve, this way frees people to focus on fewer relationships and over time to make more disciples of Jesus who make disciples with Jesus. And

speaking of Jesus... since Jesus makes His followers into fishers of people—into disciples who make disciples with Jesus—it would be helpful for us to consider the primary disciple-making rhythms of Jesus’ life.

Have you ever read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with this simple question in mind: *How did Jesus make disciples who make disciples?* That is, what did He actually do in His everyday relationships with the twelve men He invited along? I have done that exercise several times, and I consistently come back to four prominent rhythms that evidence in how Jesus made disciples.

I suggest that He had at least these four regular rhythms with those men:

1. He invited them along to *serve* with Him.
2. He invited them along to travel with and *eat* with Him.
3. He invited them along to *Sabbath* with Him.
4. He invited them along to *learn* with Him.

May we do these in order to make disciples as Jesus did.

1. Serve Together

Jesus served people consistently. He invited along these men to do the same. One particular story that captures this well comes to mind:

The mother of Zebedee’s sons approached him, bringing with her James and John. She knelt down to ask him for something.

“What do you want?” he asked her.

“Promise,” she said to him, “that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right and the other on your left, in your kingdom.”

Jesus answered, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”

“We are able,” they said to him.

He told them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right and left is not mine to give; instead, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

When the ten disciples heard this, they became indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:20-28, CSB).

I suggest to you that Jesus did not serve others only for the sake of the people whom He served, but also for the sake of the twelve men whom He invited along to serve with Him. Service is not a Christian obligation; it must be framed inside of disciple making to fully understand why Jesus stressed it so much. This is how the Gospel is best embodied—when those who have been given much in turn give to those who have little.

If you’ve invited people to Bible studies and worship gatherings, have you ever considered inviting the lost and searching—those who

have yet to believe—along with you to serve, as well? Of course, you would have to serve consistently and relationally to do so. But if we want to make disciples in the regular rhythms Jesus did, this should be how we are relationally making disciples of Jesus who make disciples with Him.

2. Eat Together

I dedicated an entire chapter to this (see Shift 3 above), but I am including it again here for you to see in the context of how Jesus made disciples during everyday rhythms. Remember, Jesus came eating and drinking (Luke 7:34). The men who did not recognize Him along the road to Emmaus finally recognized Him when He broke bread with them (Luke 24). Jesus must have eaten often with His followers. I have already touched on this, but let me stress again how meaningful shared meals are in relational disciple making. Invite along those who are already believers as well as those who have yet to believe to eat with you, and by doing this, we might actually make disciples like Jesus did.

3. Sabbath Together

Jesus would often retreat to pray and rest, and He invited along the disciples to do this with Him regularly (Luke 5:16; Matt. 14). This is what I mean by saying that we must “Sabbath together” because Sabbath is not valued enough in the church today. Plus, I fear it is commonly misunderstood. If we understand practicing Sabbath in the context of disciple-making relationships, we see that it provides the opportunity not only for the disciple maker to get much needed refreshment but also for those who have been invited along to see firsthand what it’s like to pray and rest with the Heavenly Father. I

bet some of the disciples' greatest moments of seeing how Jesus related to God the Father happened during these Sabbath moments. If we don't Sabbath and invite others along to Sabbath with us, then we are not making disciples like Jesus did.

4. Learn Together

Finally, it's odd to state this as a separate disciple-making rhythm because learning happens in the midst of all the other rhythms of Jesus, but I must say it anyway. The disciples learned while they served together, and they learned while they ate, traveled together, and practiced Sabbath together, as well. It is important to note that the overarching message Jesus communicated to His followers—the Gospel—shaped all of those conversations in the flow of everyday relationship.

Now, we come back full circle to the first shift I suggested in this book, “from Gospel presentation to Gospel presence.” Jesus repeatedly and creatively taught the Gospel of the Kingdom to twelve men (among others), and it is important (especially if you come from an “invite to” paradigm of “discipleship”) to understand that learning is not confined to a scheduled teaching time in the “invite along” way of relational disciple making; rather, learning happens in the flow of life, much like a child learns lessons from their parent in everyday life.

As a parent, I don't have a set schedule for when my kids learn things that will be formative for their lives. While Jen and I are intentional (or at least try to be) and while we schedule time together, we can't schedule learning together. Time together is required for learning together, but learning together is not limited to a specific

time. It just happens as intentional disciple makers share their life with disciples.

Jeff Vanderstelt wrote a helpful book called *Gospel Fluency*.¹¹ As a summary, I would suggest that in the book he explains how the words of Jesus can become our words and the ways of Jesus can become our ways in the context of everyday life. This “Gospel fluency” is something we never stop learning, and it is required in order for us to learn the Gospel with those whom we have invited along. Gospel fluency comes because we have immersed ourselves into Gospel-of-the-Kingdom life with Jesus. Then, those we invite along and into that life with Jesus also begin to grow in Gospel fluency. Together, we translate the Gospel into one another’s lives as we become disciples of Jesus who make disciples with Him—together.

Although I took years of French language and can read it fairly well even now, I was never taught to be fluent in French (probably because I never lived where it is spoken in everyday life). I fear our “invite to” way of discipleship is like my learning of French, and many of us lack Gospel fluency. We have lots of Bible knowledge, but we haven’t lived in relationships where the Gospel is spoken and lived in everyday life. “Inviting along” relational disciple making allows for the environment in which we can develop Gospel fluency.

In these regular rhythms of Jesus’ life, into which He has now also invited us along, we can become disciples of Jesus who make disciples with Him as we invite along other believers and those who have yet to believe. We invite them into a family-like relationship with us.

Whom will you invite along with you?