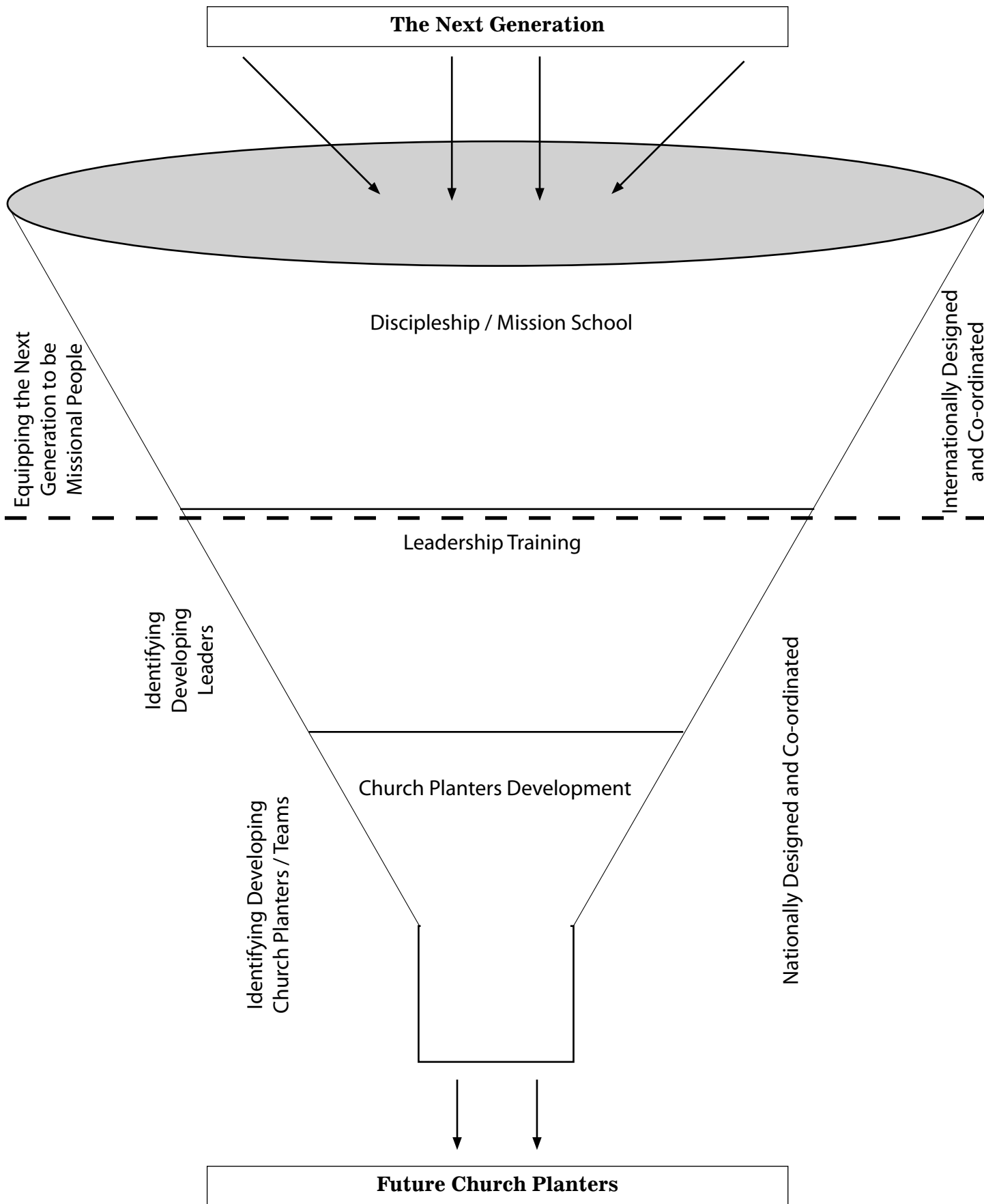


# A GLOBAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIP PROCESS WITHIN THE VINEYARD MOVEMENT



# **INTERNATIONAL VINEYARD SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION**

Ratified Version - The Istanbul Accord - May 5th, 2004

## **VISION:**

We recognize that our future and our legacy depends on our ability to equip, mobilize and release the next generation of young people entrusted to us as a movement. While equipping is best achieved when localized it is more effective when the global dimension is included. Many Para-church organizations have proven the inherent value of equipping in modules (3-9 month intensive segments) and in cross-cultural situations. While effective on one level they have lacked the ability to keep young people connected to and passionate about the role of the local church in the advancing of the Kingdom. The Vineyard movement is positioned to foster discipleship within the context of the local church, while facilitating the integration of the local to the Global. The cross-cultural dimension enhances our equipping and discipling process. Maximizing our Global network enables us to equip in a cross-cultural setting without compromising the value and central role of the local church. Our vision is to see the participants become missional people. The vast majority of students will likely fulfill their calling within various vocations within society. However, they will all gain the perspective of a Kingdom-centered worldview with a broadened understanding of what it means to be a disciple.

## **PURPOSE:**

"To assist the local church in discipling the next generation in Kingdom living and values while equipping them to fulfill the calling on their lives by providing an intense period of discipleship."

## **OBJECTIVE:**

### **What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?**

If we look at discipleship through the lens of relationship we can identify four primary relationships that we will continue to visit and re-visit through out our lives. With each visit we gain further clarity and deepen our experience with living life the way it was meant to be lived. When we say yes to following Christ we say yes to his process and his perspective on life and relationships. Part of the discipleship journey has aspects similar to that of a planet orbiting in space. Like a planet that orbits identifiable masses in space we orbit identifiable relationships in our discipleship process. As does the planet in motion we to see the same object from differing angles and in a differing light with each orbit. The result is we are given a more complete view of those relationships. The life long journey of being a disciple involves gaining greater clarity on these four identifiable relationships. We have identified those four relationships as the foundation of our discipleship process.

The four relationships we grow clearer in seeing are:

1. Seeing God clearly - How we see God and our relationship to him is vital to our ability to be an effective disciple of Jesus.
2. Seeing ourselves clearly - If we see humanity as God does (Psalm 8) it affects how we see ourselves.
3. Seeing community clearly - When we understand that we are not an island unto ourselves but we are born for community with others. Seeing the collective of our lives clearly affects our relationship to and understanding of church/community changes.
4. Seeing the world and society clearly - When we recognize the value God places on creation and civilization as we know it (spheres of influence such as education, arts, government, technology, science, business, family, etc) and its place in our lives we will relate to our surroundings and our vocation from a Kingdom perspective.

\* See appendix #2 for more detail on the above

**CORE QUALITIES:** - Qualities we want to cultivate throughout this experience

**Integrity** - When we recognize that an integration of our thoughts, actions and feelings is required for us to live with integrity if we are on the road to living authentically. When we remain true and do not compromise ourselves or live with disintegration for the sake of personal gain, promotion or power we are becoming effective disciples.

**Servant hood** - It is important for us to recognize that at the heart of following Christ is the growing desire to serve others and not gain power over them. Cultivating the attitude of a servant is central to being an authentic follower of Christ.

**Humility** - We do not need to apologize for who we are nor our gifts, neither need we flaunt ourselves in hopes of recognition, power or money. A quiet but assured confidence is a central value to be cultivated in all Disciples of Christ

**Obedience** - Obedience and faithfulness to God are primary. It is not success, position or any other reward offered to us that should motivate a disciple of Christ. Having the courage to make the difficult choices in favour of obedience and the pleasure of God is central to becoming an effective disciple.

**Transparency** - To the degree that we are secure in the grace of God and our place in his love is to the level that we are generally open, vulnerable and transparent. When we are in the pursuit of righteous living but are not transparent with our short-comings and struggles we end up falling into a life of hypocrisy. Self-disclosure is an antidote to keep us from the evil within ourselves and from the enemy's deceit and control in our pursuit of righteous living.

**Wholeness** - Not being whole keeps us from becoming like Christ. We all have baggage in our lives that will often surface in intense community experiences. Learning how to face and own our baggage in the presence of others is humbling. However it allows the healing process towards wholeness to be increased, making us more effective disciples.

**CORE EXPERIENCES:** Experiences identified that will make this school effective

**Equipping** - When people who walk in spiritual authority, often due to their expertise and experience, share their lives and God's word with us it allows our lives to be enriched and strengthened as disciples. We anticipate various people with spiritual authority will be involved in the equipping aspect.

**Cross-cultural experiences** - When we find ourselves outside our comfort zones and in environments that are less familiar to us we are more adapt to pay attention and to hear and see things we have not been able to hear and receive prior. Getting out of our comfort zones and seeing life through another cultures ways helps challenge our own view of the world and our assumptions about life and God. These experiences ready us for changes in ourselves.

**Mentoring process** - We recognize that the most effective way to equip someone is through a mentoring relationship. We would anticipate that each school would have a process by which mentoring relationships will be formed for the development of their students. We would anticipate that the mentors would be part of the local community thereby integrating the students further into the life of the local community.

**Peer relationships** - When we are put in an intensive community situation our "stuff" often comes to the surface. Alone or without intense pressure in our lives relationally we may simply not see or experience the complete truth of who we are. An intensive living environment with peers for a sustained time further enhances the discipleship process in our lives if we submit to it.

**Practical Service and Ministry** - The opportunity to both serve in practical ways as well as being involved in ministry opportunities will give time for the training phase and the new ideas introduced to settle in and take root in a person's life.

**CORE CONTENT:** (9 Core weeks of Teaching) Developing skills and ways of living that require instruction

**Relationship with God (Lifestyle of a worshipper)** - Understanding how to relate to and interact with God is vital to our lives. Developing a life of worship, prayer and intercession affects a disciples view and ability to follow freely.

**The Church** - The mission of God is the foundation for the mission of the church. The church is a community spawned by the mission of God and gathered up into that mission, says Guder. The church is a community sent by God and we need to understand the role of the Church in God's heart.

**Being a Missional people** - God is a missional God. Therefore we can assume His people are a missional people. Learning a live a life of recognizing that we are "called" enhances the quality and focus of vocations, relationships and purpose on earth.

**Growth and Change** - How do we grow and change spiritually? - What is the process or principles of spiritual growth that allow us to become more like Christ throughout our lives.

**Stewardship of resources and life** - We learn that we must become effective stewards of our life and resources if we are to be an effective disciple - our vocation, calling, time, money, and relationships are primary.

**Living as a leader** - We are all called to some level of leading in our lives. Understanding that we have been given gifts, skills and a unique personality that needs developing is vital to taking responsibility for our lives. This is the first step to living like a leader.

**The Kingdom of God** - Understanding the central message of the New Testament is vital. Jesus proclaimed that message - "The Kingdom of God is near". Learning how to access and walk in that reality makes us effective disciples.

**The Ministry of Jesus (Luke 4)** - Jesus was empowered by the spirit to heal the sick, release the captives, open blind eyes and preach the good news to the poor. Jesus not only did that but He gave that ministry to us. Understanding and experiencing the prophetic and the power of the Holy Spirit is vital to Kingdom living and living as He lived.

**Appreciating diversity** - Understanding the issues of cultures, races, generations, and the role of the individual and the church in breaking down barriers and bringing reconciliation makes us more effective disciples.

\*See appendix #1 for more detail on the above

## **STRATEGIES:**

- **Local Church based**

The uniqueness of our discipleship strategy is we desire to keep it local church based. Each school operated would be significantly connected to and involved in the life of a church and/or a couple of churches. This allows for the crucible of an intense living environment within the reality of everyday living. It allows the students to have application to their learning within the context of the primary vehicle of N.T. discipleship- the local church. It allows the local church to learn to open itself as well. Each church that sponsors a school would need a wide consensus within the church to embrace this equipping model into the life of their community for this period of time. The commitment of the discipleship school is to prepare students for a healthy participation in there church of origin.

- **Nationally led**

Each school will be led and have its final point of authority within a National Vineyard Movement. Responsibility for the financial, spiritual and administrative elements of the school rests between the local church sponsoring the school and their relationship with the National Vineyard Movement. This relationship will be worked out in each nation independent of the other nations. The multiplication of schools is a national responsibility but should include dialogue within the global movement. The market place will determine the number of sustainable schools in any given season or region. We would hope that “preferring our brother” would be the spirit in which we approach multiplication globally. We hope we would be as interested in the Vineyard succeeding globally as we would our own nation.

- **Partnerships in areas**

Some schools will require and/or benefit from involving a few Vineyard churches within an area to both support the school in providing the experience of community and financial and or practical support (housing, meals, etc). Some schools will be based in one church but serve and connect with a number of churches within a geographic radius while other schools will be hosted by a cluster of churches equally.

- **Stages of training schools**

Like the top of a funnel the Discipleship School only catches the widest end of discipleship development. We will partner internationally for that first level of training, however, the next levels, which involve leadership training and church planting, will be developed by each AVC. (See: funnel diagram). This discipleship school’s intention is to touch the most basic elements of being a disciple of Christ. If we know that further modules is an option we will keep this first school as a basic training and paint in broad strokes and not try to fit everything we believe and value into the curriculum.

- **Multiplication of schools**

Having a qualified and trained school leader is the number one asset to launching an effective school. Housing and a committed contributing local church would be secondary to the trained leader. Location should first be determined by leadership not housing or local churches. Modular equipping requires a skilled leader and team to be able to effectively integrate life and material, local community and students, cultures and speakers, learning and doing. We have found the most effective way for multiplication of this type of training is through a “learning by doing” model. New leaders either have experience as an equipper or come alongside an existing school.

- **Internationally communicated and coordinated**

We would initially produce one agreed upon marketing strategy which includes all the participating schools in the movement. The diversity of the schools would involve various lengths of times (3 - 6 months with an outreach segment) and various expressions and add-ons to each school (outdoor training or unique topics or speakers) along with the uniqueness of the various cultures. That strategy was determined by a consensual process of the contributing nations. The first marketing strategy would begin a process in the summer of 2004 and be launched by November 2004. Secondly each nation hosting a school will include in their budget funds for the school leaders to get together once every year for training, dialogue, coordination and development. This helps ensure and enhance the quality and networking ability of the training process globally.

## **SCHOOL STRUCTURE:**

Each school would have the following elements included.

### **4 - 6 month school structure:**

1. 9 weeks of core curriculum
2. 3 - 7 weeks of optional curriculum (school leaders and Nation's preferences)
3. 2- 6 weeks outreach in a cross - cultural setting
4. 2 weeks of service in partnering local churches during training phase.
5. Weekly schedule: Training& teaching, journaling, small group, community outreach, community building, mentoring relationships, reflections, involvement in local church, home groups, serving locally, processing life impact.

### **6 - 9 month school structure:**

1. 9 weeks of core curriculum
2. 7 - 14 weeks of optional curriculum
3. 6 - 9 weeks of outreach in a cross -cultural setting
4. 2 weeks of service in partnering local churches during training phase.
5. Weekly schedule: Training& teaching, journaling, small group, community outreach, community building, mentoring relationships, reflections, involvement in local church, home groups, serving locally, processing life impact.

## **ACTION PLAN**

This is outlined in the minutes from the GMTF meeting in May 2004 in Istanbul

## **APPENDIX**

### **Item #1**

#### **School content**

While some schools will tackle this process via a topical approach we in Canada are going to attempt a narrative approach combined with a topical approach. We will have the school leader facilitate an unfolding narrative for an hour each day or on Monday mornings for the full morning during the school while we have specialists come in for 2 hours a day or 3 mornings and an evening to teach on the skills outlined above.

#### **Narrative Approach Outline**

Sample Narrative teaching - one hour a day of teaching on this 4 days a week throughout the school - lead by school leader)

##### **1. The grand story**

Nature of God and His Character - The God of Creation (Week 1)  
Nature of God and man's relationship (Creation, fall) (Week 1)  
God's Intentions - Seeing life from God's perspective (Week 2)  
The Missionary God (Abrahamic Covenant) (Week 3)  
A People and their God (Israel and Yahweh) (Week 3)

## **2. The center piece of our story - Jesus**

The Message of the Kingdom of God (Prophets and Messianic expectation) (Week 4)

Sin and the Cross (Week 5)

The Word and Works of Jesus (Week 6)

The great Commission (Week 6)

## **3. The story of redemption lived out collectively - The family story**

The sending of the Holy Spirit - His role and relationship with us - God working primarily through His church for us and the World (Week 7)

Kingdom Advancement (Gentile expansion) - relationship between the gospel and culture (Week 8)

Constantinian Period - Church Splits - convergence movement (Our family history) - (Week 9)

## **4. Relationship with God is where we enter the story personally**

The Bible growing from God and His people (Week 10)

The inspiration and authority of scripture (Week 10)

Hearing the Voice of God (Week 11)

Cultivating a relationship with God through the scriptures (Week 11)

## **5. Our place in the story**

Understanding community (Week 12)

The role of community in Discipleship (Week 12)

God. Creation, relationship (Week 13)

Being and making Disciples - (Week 14)

Values of our community called the vineyard (Week 15)

## **6. Where is the Story going?**

Growing in Christ likeness/ maturity (15)

Seeing all of life as potentially redemptive and Spirit-bearing (Week 15)

Relationship with the world (family, life and vocation) (Week 16)

The 3 dimensional mission (Week 16)

To worship God and enjoy him forever (Week 16)

## **Item #2**

We have started to give some further definition to the four foundational relationships of the discipleship process. We wanted to give you our initial thoughts as well as invite you give us yours in this process

### **1. Seeing God clearly**

Throughout the history of Western Christian tradition, the focus in describing God's nature has been to define his unchanging attributes. And so we acknowledge that God is: omni benevolent (all-good), omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), etc... This kind of description is an important one. After all, in a plurality of religious traditions (which despite common belief to the contrary do not describe the same God) it is important to distinguish who God has declared Himself to be. This history of describing God via His immutable attributes extends back to a Platonic approach in which God (the prime mover) was expressed in terms of abstract, and often rather unfeeling and "inhuman", absolutes.

Although it is important for us to understand God's unchanging attributes, it is just as important to understand his relationship to his creation -- especially his relationship to us. And we need not be shy of speaking of God in such a way. After all, the Bible, God's inspired and authoritative Word is riddled with expressions of God's emotional, tangible connection to the fragile, flawed species known as the human race.

Jesus himself calls us to speak to God as our Father. Such a concept was revolutionary in Jesus' day. And Jesus wasn't merely speaking of referring to God as Father as a sign of submission to his ultimate authority and leadership. Considering the term Jesus actually used was, "abba," the point hits home all the more. "Abba" was the term a small child would use to describe his most intimate, unfailing ally. A child's "abba" loved unconditionally and was concerned with every detail of the child's life, right down to the smallest, seemingly mundane detail. And it is in this manner that Jesus encouraged us to relate to the Father in Heaven.

In raising disciples of Christ who really can enter into the abundant life and become, as Dallas Willard puts it, "fully alive," it is essential that this kind of relationship with God be fostered. In many Christian circles, God is still perceived as an unfeeling, hyper-critical deity who sits on His throne waiting to "zap" the person who fails to do His perfect will. Now this description is a far-cry from Jesus' understanding of the Father. It's not surprising that such "believers" live a life full of anxiety and guilt.

It seems that even in circles where God is described in a "softer" light, people still struggle with feelings of guilt and a sense of not "measuring up." Even in these churches, the old conceptions of the unfeeling "unblinking eye on high" continue to endure. And much of this is confounded by the fact that many people "see" God as a mirror image of their own earthly fathers. And unfortunately, these role-models often left much to be desired.

Today, in your average theological seminary, it is still the norm to describe God in terms of the Platonic ideals. And so it shouldn't be surprising that church becomes not much more than a watered down version of the seminary experience. After all, how can leaders expect to impart to their congregations anything that they themselves have yet to learn?

In the end though, if we are to raise and release disciples who walk in true grace; who feel they can approach the throne of God- with boldness, as a child approaches his "abba," then we need to help people see God in His true light. Yes, He is indeed perfectly powerful, perfectly good, perfectly just, etc... But just as importantly, He is a perfectly loving Father who sees each individual believer as His own beloved child. And so the child has significance and purpose, in his or her very design; before he or she takes a single step or mumbles a single word. A Church full of people with intimate heart knowledge like this would truly be a witness to a world in such desperate need for real love and significance.

## **2. Seeing ourselves clearly:**

Once the believer has established that God is his or her intimate, loving, Father then the shift to seeing himself or herself as ultimately valuable, unique, and beloved becomes a more natural step. The process really cannot work in reverse. "God first loved us" and from that initiation of love the child finds meaning in his or her being. And this healthy, fully loved child of God will reciprocate the love towards the Father as a natural consequence.

Again, it is important to help Christians realize that the love of the Father is not an abstract, intangible ideal. Ironically, because Christians internalize the fact that God loves perfectly (which is so unlike their own ability to love), they begin to see His love as other worthy. In other words- intangible, not of this world. This again boils down to the issue of seeing God clearly. Just because God is absolute, doesn't mean he can't love with real heart emotion. We must remember that God made us in His image. And so the desire for a reciprocating, loving relationship is first and foremost a "God thing".

So once this is established in the believer's understanding of the Father, then the transformation in self-understanding should naturally begin to happen. If not, then most likely there is a block tied to an earthly experience in which the person came to believe at some root level- that they weren't significant and loved. At the end of the day, the process is still the same though, it just takes longer. When the person realizes that God loves all of his children fully and

without partiality, then he or she will inevitably begin to process that they themselves are one of those beloved children.

Now of course, this process doesn't happen in a vacuum. If the process only involved the person sitting alone in a white room memorizing scripture verses about God's love, the process would be seriously hindered. Because of course, this is a rather intangible process. It's difficult to feel tangible love in such a context. That's where community begins to enter the picture.

In and through community, God's love reaches out in very tangible ways to His children and to the World. At first a person who receives love from a community may feel that others are only responding to them out of a sense of obligation. In other words, they are only "being nice" because they "have to" be. But over time, real love always makes its mark. If love is sincere it will eventually be perceived as sincere- even if that process takes some time.

But this is the thing- as the individual child begins to internalize his or her own significance and "belovedness" then it is inevitable that eventually he/she will begin to see their brothers and sisters in the Lord, in the same way. And this is again where heart transformation is the key. We have all heard the popular expression "What Would Jesus Do?" It evolved into a bumper-sticker campaign that well meaning Christians thought would begin to transform the behaviour of Christians.

But ultimately, while behaviour modification is somewhat helpful in the short term, it will inevitably fall well short of what it is God has intended for us. If we only "act" like Jesus, without developing the hearts that naturally provoke such action, then we aren't truly becoming Christians, we're only becoming mimics. And all this does is further instill the belief system where God is abstract and intangible to us flawed human beings who at most can only hope to "act" like Him once in a while.

What should happen is a much deeper and more profound work. God is seeking to transform our very hearts- not primarily our actions. As our hearts begin to reflect His own, then we begin to respond lovingly, in a fully natural way, to God and to the people we encounter in our daily lives. And so it becomes, if you'll excuse the expression, a "giant love-in". In other words, the love of the Father begins to multiply amongst His children and from them to the World as well. And when this happens, the Church has begun to truly fulfill its destiny: "By your love for each other the World will know you."

### **3. Seeing community clearly**

It is from the mutual respect and understanding that we have gained through seeing ourselves and others clearly that we begin to see God's design behind community- the "collective us". Knitted into the very fabric of our co-existence as a group of believers will be "agape"- a divinely-inspired and divinely sustained brotherly love. We are more than peers, more than associates- according to God Himself, we are now family. Family bound by blood is strong; but even stronger, deeper and richer is a family bound by Spirit. And such is the case with the family of God.

Now before we get into the role community plays in exhortation, accountability and correction, we need to speak about the natural, and yet fully supernatural, reasons why community is such a good thing- such a God thing. "No man is an island". This is not a command so much as it is a statement of fact. We are not, by design, meant to live isolated lives. We are, by nature, communal. And so when we hear that we are not "islands" we need to hear God's heart to release a people "fully alive" in their togetherness.

God knows we love being together- because, of course, he created us that way. And wherever God created a nature, or a predisposition towards something, he also designed the means to fulfill it. In other words, God only creates desire when He has also planned a means for fulfilling that desire. And community is the fulfillment God planned, for our desire for togetherness and collective belonging.

Now in the West and in North America in particular, this may be a shock to our systems. So many of us walk crowded city streets in relative anonymity. We are a society so advanced in our ability (or capacity) to communicate (email, cell phone, satellite transmission, etc...) and yet so isolated and alone. It really is a bizarre predicament. When we look for a neighbourhood to live in, we look for a place that is quiet, separate, independent- cut off from the "bother" of others' lives. And we think by pursuing this we will find happiness. And yet, such a pursuit really goes against our very natures. Primarily, we find our individual identity only in our communal identity- not the other way around, as so many in our society falsely believe. Community, in its right place, doesn't mean losing one's individuality- it means truly finding it.

Once the fabric of our togetherness, and our collective identity, is stitched with agape, it gains a strength to sustain other functions as well; functions such as exhortation, accountability and correction. And this is because any individual in the community, assuming it is functioning as it should, has the assurance that any challenge to his or her way of living, is motivated by love and love alone. When one is truly assured of this, and I mean truly assured, then there is no fear of abuse of authority or of excessive control being used. Unless an individual is self-destructive, he or she will understand that accountability is for his/her own good.

And of course we can't stop with the individual. Unlike common belief to the contrary, whenever we hurt ourselves by making decisions that go against God's natural design for us, then we, by definition, hurt the community as well. The ripple effect of sin in the world is the main reason why the planet is in the sorry state that it is. And yet our society goes on telling us, and trying to believe, that everything boils down to the individual alone- individual choice, individual rights, individual consequence. This is the monstrous satanic myth of our time. But herein lies another strength of the fabric of community; when we have agape for one another, it is much more difficult to do the wrong thing; when we know full well it will inevitably hurt our brothers and sisters in the Lord if we do so.

And so with all this in mind we begin to understand the genius behind God's heart for community. First and foremost he created as communal creatures that, if you'll excuse the sentimental picture, stand in a circle holding hands while He centers all of our lives. And so we are emotionally fulfilled in a way only community can fulfill us. Secondly, we find our individual identities, in the context of community; because it is there that we begin to understand and exercise the gifts God has given us to bless Him and others. Thirdly, community forms a fabric that is infinitely stronger than the individual alone. It's only real rule is mutual support and respect in the journey of faith. And from this comes the strength, draped in love, to help us live the abundant lives God has intended for us.

#### **4. Seeing the world and society clearly**

So if we have covered seeing clearly- God, ourselves and others, and the societies we live in, what then remains? Well what follows is everything else- the created order. In terms more familiar to contemporary audiences, what about the environment, the planet or the cosmos? How do we begin to see these clearly? We begin by looking back instead of forward, to what God's original stated intention for the created order was.

In Genesis God created the universe and declared that His work was good- an understatement of the grandest order; but we get the point. In God's creative nature the cosmos is inherently good- because it is God's handiwork. God didn't make a universe grey and mundane, He made one rich in forms, colours, dimensions, etc... Everywhere you look you see that God made the Creation lavishly, abundantly, spectacularly.

If efficiency were God's only goal then what we observe wouldn't make much sense. No, clearly God meant to inspire us with extravagant beauty. Even the most ardent atheist will spend much of His life admiring the creation he denies has any design. Modern science, now an institution often serving the atheistic agenda, began as a Christian institution meant to study the intricate workings of God's creation. It was only in more recent times that the study has grown to be separated from an ultimate maker.

So we know that the created order is the glorious work of the Creator; designed in its rapturous delights to remind us of the divine imagination that gave birth to everything we see. What is our role in it all? Well even early on we see that God didn't create the cosmos, completely independently of mankind; quite the contrary is the case. God

invited man to name- and thus to give meaning and context to the very things he created. He made mankind a partner in the process of creation itself. So we need not shy away from our role in the process.

Clearly God meant from the outset that we would play a stewardship role. We read that we are to "subdue" the earth. At least that is the translation we often read. Perhaps the Hebrew is better expression by the term "steward" or "govern"- the earth. The point was not that we would dominate and destroy the world, but rather that we would give leadership to the rest of the natural order. We have been made in the truest sense of the words, Kings and Queens of the Cosmos.

So how does one see the Created Order clearly? Well first and foremost, we are reminded that the cosmos is the handiwork of the Lord, declared good and sacred, by the Creator Himself. There is no inch of soil upon the earth that is not sacred ground. Secondly we recognize that we have been given a key role in the stewardship of that created order. We are here to give leadership to everything around us, by the divine authority that God Himself has granted to us.

Ultimately creation serves its real purpose, when we explore a field bursting with gold, ascend a majestic peak, or consider the immense and almost unfathomable dimensions of the known universe, and are reminded of the great glory of the awesome maker of it all. When we combine the awe of such an understanding with the fact that this same Creator has invited us to approach Him as little children approaching a doting Father, then we have truly begun to understand the blessing it is to be alive in such a universe.

In most of North America and in the West in general, the state of affairs is a decidedly post-Christian one. Canada leads the pack and is considered by many sociologists the most post-modern society in the world. Much of Europe is in a similar state. The United States is more superficially "Christian"- but beyond pretences, it too is moving quickly down a post-modern path. Much of the rest of the World- which of course makes up the majority of the population is either pre-modern or moving with the advent of industrialism, into a stage of modernism, a stage the West began to move away from 30-40 years ago. Regardless of which of these societies we live in, the question remains, what should the Christian response to society be?

Some groups associated with Christianity have chosen an extreme path. They answer the question by removing themselves entirely from the "the World". They have resisted the advances of technological innovation and the secularization of society by forming a sub-culture that tries to exist, as much as is humanly possible, separately from the rest of the greater society. They have chosen the path of being an island unto themselves.

Other groups have taken an opposite, but similarly extreme stance in regards to this question. Some groups have allowed the society to dictate to the Faith itself. And in the process these groups have "shifted their views" in order to become more compatible with the greater society. The problem is that this has happened to the degree where they are, for the most part- indistinguishable from the society at large. This "progressive" approach has led many to ask questions as to where the ultimate authority lies.

How shall we live in relation to our environment and society and still be biblically authentic? The answer is neither being an isolated island nor in being a replica of the World. How, then do we get there? Note that the matter of being "in" but not "of" the world was important enough for Jesus to include in his final, intimate prayer with his disciples. The answer is to be found neither in isolating ourselves nor in replicating the values and structures of the world. How then, do we arrive at this strange place - being "in" but not "of"? Assuredly, only with the Holy Spirit's help. So what does it require of us? How can we begin to see clearly what is going on in our world? Transformation of our thinking is required and learning to see things from God's perspective is part of becoming a follower of Jesus. It's clear from the Bible that God's heart is that all people, all nations, would come under the rule of His Kingdom on the earth.

Ironically, much of our post-modern, post-Christian society functions via the ethical structures that have their origin in the Christian message. In other words, for the most part, every legal, educational, and governmental system of contemporary society is based on an ethic that was first espoused by Jesus himself. But of course, the comprehension of this origin is lost to the average person today. People seem to believe that somehow society just sort of "evolved"

into the form it takes today through the benevolent will of mankind. All one has to do is travel to a society not governed by a Christian ethic to see what "progression" looks like outside of the teachings of Christ.

Getting back to our original question, what purpose for society should we as disciples of Christ seek? Should the Church become a sub-culture that lies low and out of sight of the World at large? Surely, Scripture argues against this. Should we try and mix our beliefs and values with those of the culture at large? Understanding that our values will inevitably change as a result? Some have argued for a third option; that of a society transformed by the reign of God on the earth. This is what our aim should be; not that our societal structures would be "tweaked" here and there in order to resemble more of our values, but that the very structures would be transformed in order that they would serve to accomplish God's will for the World. If we aim for anything less than this ultimate transformation, then we fall short of the degree to which God intends to transform not only every human heart, but also the function of our society. However, like healing and other supernatural expressions of the Kingdom on earth, we realize any transformation of society we experience becomes a "sign of the kingdom" and an expression of the activity and the reign of God, which will not be seen in fullness until the end of this present age when Jesus returns for his church.

