



# Real-Life Relationships

How do we relate in love to those we disciple?

## Real Life Relationships!

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What do I mean by a Real-Life Relationship?

A real-life relationship is sharing life with a person that you give the right to know everything about you and they give you the right to know everything about them.

One of the men I disciple has told me that I am one of only three people in his life that he gives the right to know everything about him. In my experience, three is a lot for most people. Most people don't have one. (This is especially true of Pastors. 70% of Pastors say they are lonely. 50% of Pastors that start out in ministry will not last 5 years.)

Why are real-life relationships important?

Genesis 2:5

18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone;

NKJV

It is not good for man to be alone. God said this before the fall of man. God created us relational beings. He created us with a need to walk with one another and to know one another. That need is spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical.

Real-life relationships are even more important since the fall of man. Sin leads to isolation. Isolation leads to all kinds of spiritual, mental, and emotional problems.

Real life relationships create accountability, encouragement, and support. These are all things that we need for growth and change in a fallen world.

Who should I choose for a real-life relationship?

Proverbs 13:20

20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.

NKJV

Jesus chose those He disciplined. He knew that the men He disciplined would never be real with Him unless He was real with them. He bore His soul with them. Jesus knew that being real in a fallen world was necessary for discipleship to succeed.

If you are not discipling anyone, start with those you choose to disciple you.

At Western Hills, take the first step by joining one of our small groups. Are they safe? We try and make them as safe as possible.

## Our guidelines for our small groups



From the life of Jesus, we know that Real Life Relationships are the rails that effective discipleship travels on.

Jesus modeled this for us by choosing 12 guys to have real life relationships on relational journey with Him. We follow Jesus by doing with others what He did with His disciples. We choose people to be on a real-life relational journey with us.

At Western Hills, the first step is joining a group.



We want you to meet a group of people that are having real life relationships with one another. While you are there, we want you to meet one or more people that you can share life with at the deepest levels. Jesus had a multi-level ministry. He was the most real with Peter, James, and John.

When you join a group, you will be introduced to people that are on mission for Jesus. Through real life relationships you will begin to learn that your life can make a difference one person at a time. You will learn how to disciple others. You will learn how to disciple the lost.

Now for many people in most churches, learning to make disciples is not on their radar because so many church members do not intend on discipling anyone.

One way to avoid the challenges of marriage is don't get married. You can be born a celibate or God may call you to celibacy as a Christian.

But....

**If you follow Jesus, discipleship celibacy is not an option!**

- **Being a disciple of Jesus that makes disciples of Jesus is who you are (Romans 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 3:18)**

You were born again with the Spirit of Jesus. You have His DNA. It was who He was. To be a disciple in relationship with others to reproduce disciples is who you are.

- **Being a disciple that disciples others is who Jesus calls you to be (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 28:19-20)**

In fact, Jesus promises that if you follow Him, He will make you a fisher of man. (Matthew 4:19) Since Jesus never lies, this means if you are not becoming a fisher of men, you must not be following Jesus.

You will not start discipling others until you accept that discipleship celibacy is not an option. The definition of a disciple of Jesus is in His invitation. A disciple of Jesus is someone who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and is on mission for Jesus. His mission is to make disciples. This definition of disciple is the line in the sand that we have drawn at Western Hills. Have you crossed that line?

Have you ever considered that everyone Jesus chose for a real-life relationship was lost? They had real character issues. They were a mess. They were not easy guys to work with. It was a slow process.

Only one ended up being lost. What made Jesus so effective was the way He loved those guys. Love was not just his motive or how He felt, it described specific ways He related to them and others.

In this series we are going to learn from Jesus the ways He related to those He disciplined in a loving way.

- **Jesus was generous with His time with His disciples.**

Jesus spent over three years with them. They were with Him most of the days of those years. Jesus knew that His disciples would not know how much He loved them unless He was generous with His time with them.

I cannot be as generous with my time with those I disciple as Jesus was, but I can budget my time to be generous with my time with those I disciple.

It works! When I give people, I disciple my time, they feel loved! When people feel loved, I have greater opportunities and influence in their life.

Making time for those we disciple is challenging. But we must be generous with our time with those we disciple in order to be effective making disciples of Jesus. Being generous with your time with those you are leading is critical to effective leadership. Jesus showed us how important it is in discipleship. Follow Jesus!

- [Jesus knew His disciples](#)

Jesus was the Son of God. He knew all men and what was in their hearts. He saw Philip under a fig tree. He knew when His disciples were having conflicts. He knew when they were having doubts. He knew Judas was going to betray Him. He knew all of them were going to deny Him. He related to them in love based on His knowledge and understanding of them.

Knowing those we disciple is more difficult for us than it was for Jesus, but it is just as important. We must make this a priority with those we disciple. We must work very hard at this. It is not easy to really get to know someone.

There are several spiritual problems we all must overcome to make knowing someone a priority.

- [Self-focus](#)
- [Self-assurance](#)
- [Self-righteousness](#)
- [Self-reliance](#)

There is also a skill we need to develop to know those we disciple; being a good listener.

For me, maturing as a good listener has almost been as challenging as being generous with my time. I was taught certain manners about listening growing up that were helpful. I was taught to not interrupt people, especially the elderly. I was taught by coaches to listen with my eyes. I was taught to take good notes when someone is teaching me something.

But there is a lot more to be a good listener than not interrupting people, listening with my eyes, and taking good notes.

I thought I was a good listener. You can't learn much about relationships if you think you are good at it?

It was not until I was married that I became aware that I had some bad listening habits that came from being self-focused that were keeping me from knowing people.

### 1. I listened without Focus

This is the kind of listening where I am *present*, and I recognize there is noise coming from someone that is directed at me, but I don't even attempt to hear the content. This is the kind of listening parents sometimes employ with the toddler that rattles on non-stop.

I may insert an 'uh huh' in every now and then while someone is talking, but most of my attention is focused on whatever I am doing or something else on my mind.

Obviously, this type of 'listening' is not respectful of or helpful to the person doing the talking. They don't feel loved.

### 2. I listened for the 'Gist'

This is often the type of listening I employ when I am in a *hurry* or I am busy doing something else. I listen just enough to get an idea of what the other person is saying, so I can determine how it impacts **me** and whether I need to **respond**. While I am doing this, I only give half of my attention to the person speaking, putting most of my focus on my own internal dialogue and how it pertains to me. The person speaking can usually tell that my attention is elsewhere, and they are often left not feeling heard. They don't feel loved.

### 3. I listened to Respond

This has been one of the hardest habits for me to break. I am listening so I can fix the other person. I may insert a **rebuttal** or add my own *story/experience* to the conversation. I am usually just waiting for the person to pause for a moment so I can insert my argument, story, or opinion. My response often comes out quickly and enthusiastically, showing my disciple that I am *more focused* on my own agenda and being heard than I am **understanding** *their* perspective. I send others the message that what I have to say is more valuable than what they are saying, and I just want to get my point across. It is usually obvious to the other person that they are *not really being heard*. They don't feel loved.

Any one of these three ways of listening may be OK in certain circumstances. But if we really want to know those, we disciple, our way of listening needs to change.

How does it need to change?

Before I share with those I disciple, I need to really hear and understand them.

Jesus had many discussions with His disciples while they were walking from one place to another. He retreated with His disciples to solitary places. He ate meals with them.

Have you ever analyzed these discussions?

Jesus **asked** questions. We have recorded in the gospels over 300 questions that Jesus asked. Not all of them were with His disciples. Some of them were rhetorical questions in which He did not expect an answer, or the answer was self-evident.

But with His disciples, many of His discussions began with a question that would reveal something very personal about His disciples.

- Who do men say that I am?
- Why are you terrified?
- Do you also want to leave me?
- What were you talking about?
- Why did you doubt?

You would think if you were the Son of God, you would be doing all the talking since Jesus already knew all men and since He knew His time on earth was short. (It is interesting to me that the longest lecture from Jesus we have in the New Testament can be read in about ten minutes. He was with the multitudes when He gave this lecture and, in that lecture, He asked them five questions.)

But instead of doing all the talking, Jesus was always starting a discussion with His disciples by asking questions or interjecting a question during the discussion. This enabled Him to hear and understand what was really going on with His disciples.

Jesus listened to **more** than just the words that were being said or the facts that were being shared. He intentionally listened to identify the **emotions** or **issues** that laid behind the words.

Because He listened to hear and understand His disciples, they felt *genuinely loved and cared* for. It showed them He had a desire to know them **fully** and determine what they needed from Him to *support* and *help* them move forward.

I am certainly not an expert on this. I am learning. But when people share with me the situations and circumstances that are going on in their life, I will ask them simple questions like...

What makes this most difficult for you?

How are you feeling right now about what has happened?

What is your greatest concern?

Let me say this if it makes you feel any better! Most professionally trained ministers are not any good at this; even those that have been in the ministry for years.

But if you follow Jesus, Jesus intends for you to learn from Him ways to relate to those you disciple in a loving way.

- He was generous with His time
- He knew His disciples

Spiritual growth in discipleship occurs when I grow in faith and grow in love. I must learn from Jesus and the Holy Spirit how to relate to others in a loving way. Jesus is the expert at relating to people in love and developing loving relationships. Jesus knew the importance of a loving relationship in discipleship and how important it is to spiritual growth.

[A loving relationship is the rails that effective discipleship travels on!](#)

Follow Jesus!

Because of the example of Jesus, I have become very intentional about being generous with my time and knowing those I disciple.



If you follow Jesus and disciple others, I can promise you this, your life will make a difference and it will bring you great joy.

Will you receive Jesus?

Will you answer His call to make disciples?

Will you make it your goal to be like Jesus with those you disciple?

- I will be generous with my time
- I will know those I disciple