

Jesus' Training Model Three Tiers

Jesus is our perfect model both for **maturity** and also for **ministry**. It's indescribable how breathtaking Jesus is! Where would you go to discover how Jesus ministered in the 1st century so you could bring His wisdom forward to minister in your context? The four Gospels sketch out His three-tiered approach to *"make & multiply disciples."*

Jesus left the glory of heaven and became a man...without ceasing to be God, oh mystery. And He brought with Him in His incarnation this same life He experienced with His Father and the Spirit from eternity past, interactive co-love and mutual care.

Jesus then invites His people into this same life, love and light He experienced in the greatest Small Group ever, the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit. Jesus calls each of us to embrace Him fully in small, primary groups modeled after the Trinity. This was Jesus' brilliant yet simple strategy to restore the world to intimacy with His Father. *"Jesus focused on the few in small, primal groups to reach the many."* Have we been captured yet by Jesus' vision?

I want to suggest some thoughts for your study, using an illustration of backpacking in the European Alps. Incredible beauty lies hidden in the remote accesses, only accessible to experienced backpackers. If I wanted to gaze on this stunning beauty firsthand, I must initiate certain discernible steps for my first backpacking experience, as on our spiritual journey. Since Jesus is the smartest man who ever lived, these insights on Jesus' three-tiered ministry strategy provide us with a broad, flexible guideline to train as agile, creative disciples in the 21st century.

1. *"Come & See"* - **DRAW IN** Disciples (Staging Area) John 1:35-4:54 and the "crowd" in the Gospels

"Come & See" is like the staging area for a popular mountain backpacking trip, with all the amenities of a welcoming staff, exquisite restaurants, popular entertainment, quaint chalets, clean restrooms, and great children's care while the parents listen to an inviting presentation of the slopes.



"Come & See," like in John 1:35-51 and later with the crowd, is an open, inviting welcome to all, women and men, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. *"Come as you are"* into an open, permeable group where all ages and genders may fluidly come and go and get their needs met. When the crowd needed to learn, Jesus taught them. When hungry, He fed them. When sick, He healed. Jesus designed *"Come & See"* to bring His Father's presence into contact through the immediate felt-needs of the lost and the lightly committed. Those who had stepped from the antagonistic world into the curious crowd now had an opportunity to experience the caring touch of the Father and Son in community. Coming to the "staging area" is a crucial part of exploring the beauty in the Alps, but not all.

What do you choose? To be more an **admirer** of the beauty on the heights? Or an **adventurer** setting out toward the heights together with others? An **adventurer** will climb the trail.

2. *"Come & Follow Me"* - **MAKE** Disciples (The Trail) Mark 1:17-3:13; Luke 6:17ff + parallel passages

A personal choice to take ownership and responsibility in *T-E-A-M* is the only condition for climbing toward the heights. In Mark 1:17, our Guide invites us to join Him and others on His epic adventure to the heights. As we learn to climb into the Alps, the exquisite beauty trumps the pain and blisters. It takes hard work, but is well worth the effort.



The repetition of the call to others in 4:21-22 and 9:9 suggests a pattern as Jesus invites His followers to the next tier. Jesus gathered those who said "yes" into **same**-gender, *closed* small groups for a limited time. Face-to-face relationships with high levels of authenticity and transparency stand at the center of intentional, high impact, SmallGroups for and training. None of us can do this alone. We desperately need Jesus and each other. The invitation to the trail demands personal preparation, increasing commitment and full buy-in from all as a *T-E-A-M* (**T**ogether **E**veryone **A**ccomplishes **M**ore). Jesus' calls us to the trail. *"Come, follow Me and I will make you...."* Jesus trains up **F.A.T.** servants, (**F**aithful, **A**vailable, **T**eachable). If

you want to go faster, go alone. If farther, go together. As Elton Trueblood wrote:

“What [Jesus] did was to collect a few very common men and women, inspire them with the sense of his spirit and vision, and build their lives into an intensive fellowship of affection, worship & work.”

Although the trail may begin more gradually, it expands into the full range of experiences available on any adventure, the dangers and hardships, and also the heart-stopping joys and beauty. Jesus concentrated on the Twelve, even while ministering to the crowd. Jesus invites new followers from the crowd into the 2nd tier to build for the future (like the 72 in Luke 10:1). In Mark 8:34, Jesus invited the crowd to choose to move into the 2nd tier. *Both/And*. Jesus worked with “a few very common men and women.” Because He built solidly over a ten month period, His three-tiered approach has now led to the 100’s of millions of Christians in the world today.

3. “Come & Be with Me” - MULTIPLY Disciples (Guides) Mark 3:13-15, Luke 6:17ff + parallel passages

Our Guide trains and envisions more guides to take others to the heights to explore the beauty. For Jesus to fulfill His marching orders from the Team-of-Three, His ministry was never about simply drawing in the crowds or even making disciples. His heart was for the world. Jesus must build into these first disciples a spiritual DNA to also multiply disciples to guide others on this journey (Matthew 28:18-20).



In Mark 3:13-15 (Luke 6:12-16), Jesus spent the night in prayer with His Father. He then called the Twelve who Jesus had already trained and watched for ten months... and they came. His initial faith-community of Twelve was probably sub-divided into three *primal* groups of four, modeled after the closeness of the original, divine Small Group. “Jesus focused on the few to reach the many.”

This tier was a more deliberate, twenty-month training in a *closed*, **same**-gender group. He targeted emerging leaders who reproduced what Jesus had been doing to them. For Jesus to fulfill His marching

orders from the Team-of-Three, His ministry was never about simply drawing in the crowds or even making disciples. His heart was for the world. Jesus must build into these first disciples a spiritual DNA in *primal* groups to also multiply disciples to all nations worldwide.

The Guide must raise up more guides like you and me, followers who could take others to the heights. This **ground swell** of growth began slowly with Jesus’ disciples. Exponential growth begins slowly. It’s the Kingdom math of exponential multiplication to which Jesus has called us (3 becomes 9, 9 to 27, 27 to 81 and 81 to 243 in the 4th generation, 2 Timothy 2:2).

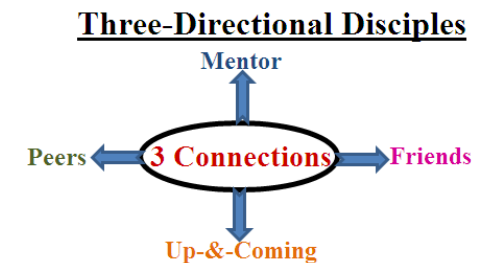
Start me with ten who are stout-hearted men and I will soon give you 10,000 more (Oscar Hammerstein in New Moon).

What Now? As His people, we are caught up with Him in His epic adventure to restore His lost world of people to intimacy with the Father. His people have the awesome privilege to partner with Him in His unchanging plan for the ages...before we fully understand. Our little stories now have eternal meaning because they are lived out within His Big Story. His unfinished mission defines our call together as faith-communities as individuals. It’s staggering that the same God who spoke the entire universe into existence desires to partner with us in this ministry of presence as one of His intimate allies.

In the words of the character John Keating in the 1989 movie *Dead Men’s Society*: “**Carpe Diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary.**”

Into whom are you investing your life? Grow to become a three-directional DiscipleMaker. It doesn’t matter if this pathway is well defined in my mind, if it’s not in yours. So jot down what **you** see as the characteristics of each of the three tiers.

Jesus’ intended end was for His followers to “Go & Multiply Disciples Together,” like Jesus did.



As the Father has sent me, I am sending you....Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21-22; see also Matthew 28:19-20).