



Systems & Relational Discipleship Models	
Systems Discipleship	Relational Discipleship
Use of teaching manuals	Teaching based on Spirit revealed needs
Use of seminars & classes	Revelation impartation - Words of Knowledge and Wisdom
In the Local Church Building	Whenever and Wherever life takes place
Information oriented	Life transmission oriented
Led by a program	Led by the Spirit
Approx. 1 hour class time per week	Indefinite, perhaps many hours per week
Bible knowledge focus	Knowing Jesus focus
Traditions of Men	Oracles of God / Doctrine of Christ
Hierarchical Administration process	Servanthood Leadership & Example
Superficial	Deep, personal, intimate
Primary evidence of success: Doing	Primary evidence of success: Being

From 33 AD to 150 AD the Church understood discipleship in terms of mature saints spending personal time with less mature saints, equipping them for service to the Lord Jesus. Saints spent time with saints ministering to the specific needs of those they were mentoring, as led by the Spirit. Through words of knowledge and wisdom shared in just about any context of life, Jesus, through the equippers, revealed Himself to the hungry and fed them on His flesh and blood. The result was that life was transmitted as led by the Spirit. The amount of time spent each day might encompass the amount of time to share a cup of coffee or the time it would take to walk from Lystra to Derbe. They were less interested in increasing the disciples knowledge of the bible, and more interested in that disciple coming to know Jesus at a deep and intimate level. Those who discipled others developed deep personal relationships with those disciples, and truly knew them after the Spirit. The final goal was not to get them “doing” specific acts of ministry, as evidence that they were true disciples, but in “being” passionate followers of Jesus, and as a result doing whatever He led them to do.

From 150 AD to 1750 AD the Church became even more institutionalized, turning most discipleship over to the formal clergy who trained, in class rooms, others who were training for the clergy. It was far more formal, and had more to do with training for political and ministerial offices of ministry. It ranged from serious study of scripture to ignoring scripture and a focus of study on Church polity and doctrine. The common believer was not perceived as a servant or disciple of Christ, but simply a supporter of the functions of the

Church and its clergy. It was cold, non relational, and focused on information transmission. Jesus was often only a point a reference rather than the focus.

From 1750 to 1850 AD the world underwent what came to be known as the **Industrial Revolution**. The Church began to take on a “Corporation” mentality, and saw itself as much a business as a mechanism to change the lives of its parishioners. Clergy began to look more like businessmen, with professional positions and titles, along with secured salaries, the goals of the Church were to gain conformity of belief and practice among its adherents. Such leadership emulated the corporate world’s approach to just about everything, and see themselves as CEO’s in the midst of the corporate body. Discipleship seldom is perceived as within the domain of the average believer, but now those who felt a “Call to the formal Ministry” began to train in Bible Colleges and Seminaries, for the professional clergy. The Local Church took on a far greater focus for religious life. Pastors, Bishops, Senior Pastors, and various other leadership titles were dolled out to gain respect and obedience from the followers. The building of Church buildings, as opposed to Cathedrals, became normative, along with it came the new push for tithes and offerings so as to sustain the paid minister’s salary. This development framed the approach to Church that has continued from 1850 to the present.

For the last 25 years, something in God’s plan has triggered many to come out of the systems and cathedral approach to understanding Church, and is moving His Church back to the Early Church approach of meeting in face-to-face relationships in the home. House Church, or relational Church, or intimate Church, or small simple Church, and several other designations for the same approach, are arising all over the world. It’s as though the Lord blew a trumpet in the heavenlies and signaled a return to an approach that more satisfies His original intent for gathering and training the saints. Those leaving the systems Churches are numbering into the millions, worldwide. Out of this a completely new understanding of discipleship is developing. Instead of class rooms and systems approach to discipleship, believers are heeding the call to develop intimate relationships with other believers and encouraging them in the things of God for their lives. A focus on Jesus, rather than programs, is marking the new development.

Those of us coming out of systems approaches tend to feel like beached whales initially. We hardly know who we are any more and what we are supposed to do. Little by little we are finding secular jobs to cover our financial needs, but keeping these jobs and incomes down to a minimum of time so as to cover the basic necessities while focusing on the call to minister. Discipleship now becomes the development of deep and serious relationships with those in the body who are hungry for Christ and His call on their lives. Anything from personal counsel to deep theological instruction is involved in this new approach. Those who feel specific calls to leadership in the body see themselves as ones called to identify the purposes of God for those they oversee in their local gatherings, and move forward with spending quality time via email, phone calls, gatherings, and personal time alone with those desiring training and equipping. Generally the format has the appearance of informality to it, though don’t be mislead; those called to this ministry learn to follow the careful leading of the Spirit in terms of knowing the things He wants shared with those who are receiving the training.

All one has to do, to understand this new development, is to look to the book of Acts, and Paul’s epistles, as clear illustrations of what relationship discipleship is to look like. He spent much time getting to know and encourage those he worked with. Ministers were far more often known as “workers,” primarily because they saw their calls to work within the body of Christ to equip the saints, encourage them in their callings, and train them in

holiness. While occasionally they employed classroom time, as in Paul's use of Tyrannus' classroom setting for training the disciples, more often than not Paul accomplished his training by living with those he was training. They traveled with him, carried his bags, ministered to his needs, asked him questions, and listened as he ministered and spent time speaking to them of the things of the Spirit necessary for their lives. Such men as Timothy, Titus, and Luke appear to have been Paul's first and primary students, and others such as Priscilla, Aquila, Trophimus, Epaphroditus, Euodias, Syntache, and others also spent significant time in training with Paul. Undoubtedly such times would have been immensely meaningful and edifying.

Our day is a day for returning to first things. 1850 years of Church history has taught us that the original patterns, far from being an optional approach, among many approaches, to building the Church, appears to have been carefully designed by Jesus and His original apostles. If we desire to honor His pattern and see the potential power of it we will return to His approach. In time the Church will grow to appreciate the wisdom of the Early Church's simplicity in all things. May God help us to discover these original patterns and implement them.