

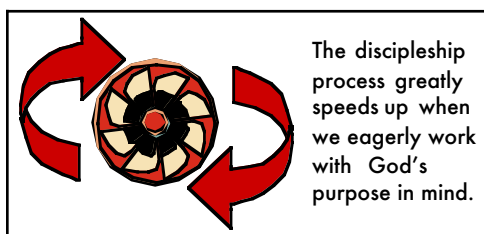
Understanding Discipleship's Life Changes

Reflections from Twelve Relationships in Cross Training

Our goal is to be like Christ. The problem is that the process of learning to be like Christ often seems threatening rather than helpful to our lives. Sometimes this is because of the way the life principles are presented to us. How do we then encourage Christians to grow?

Cross Training is a discipleship series that breaks down barriers that hold Christians back from rapid growth. Discipleship training enables more truths to be applied to Christian lives, resulting in a normal, Spirit-filled Christian.

If a Christian does not receive teaching in some areas of Christian living, he will become rather distorted. A person who eats only at greasy fast-food places can develop physical problems. The problem concerns what he is eating and what he is missing. He lacks proper nutrition. If a person eats good meals, there is little temptation to eat poorly. When a Christian knows and loves God's Word, there is much less chance of falling into temptation.

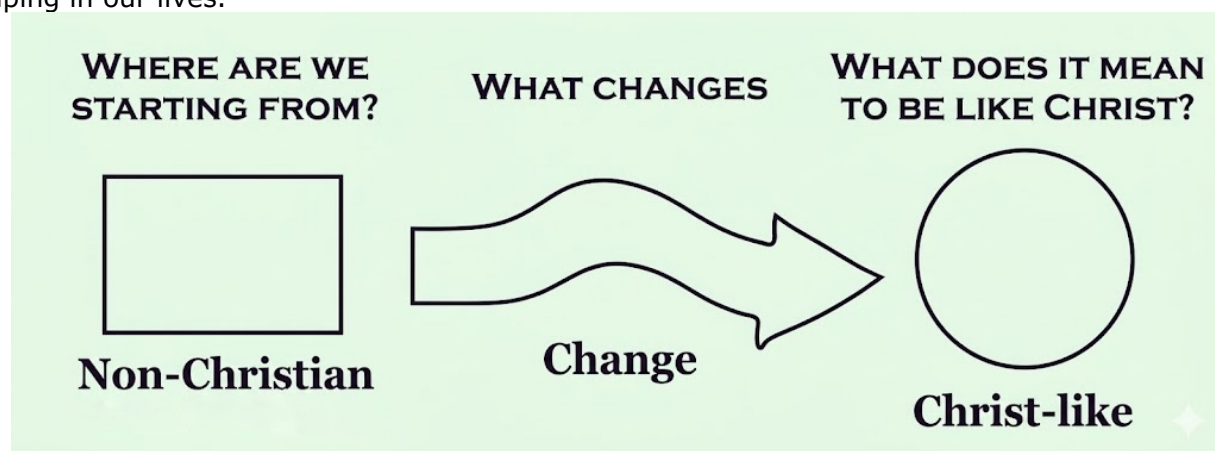


The Cross Training series has identified 12 New Testament relationships that help us focus on biblical truths from different perspectives. Jesus taught new concepts by building on what

was already familiar to His listeners. He was a great teacher. The things He saw in daily life were important places to learn about spiritual truths.

Now, it is true that some of us might not have had good earthly experiences. I used to work with young children from rough neighborhoods. We would not want them to think that God wants them to have a relationship like their earthly one. That kind of relationship can be problematic, even abusive. That is true of most of our relationships. The earthly pictures are not perfect, and sometimes we need to study the heavenly model to understand the earthly. But the fact that we need to learn certain truths from these relationships is crucial to a healthy Christian life. Important truths are revealed in nature, in society, and in God's Word.

Just before we begin thinking about what we are learning from these relationships, I want us to remember that we are growing. None of us is perfect. We all start off not very much like Christ (like the square below). Our goal, however, is to be like Christ (round). There needs to be a lot of shaping in our lives.



As we think through each relationship, we will want to think through a few questions:

1. What is being taught through this 'earthly' picture?
2. How far have we come in this one area to be like Christ?
3. In what particular way do I still need to grow?

Now remember that we have both earthly and spiritual relationships to focus on. These relational pictures are not abstract concepts but living ways to respond. One definition of life concerns how something interacts with the things around it. As Christians, we have spiritual life. Each of the three questions above will be asked of the twelve relationships. Because we have no individual in mind, we will ask questions rather than identify specific areas of change that still need to be addressed.

Twelve Relationships

• Father - child: Knowing and Resembling our Father

Virtues: Obedience, trust, love, respect
 Teachings: God the Father, Christ's Sonship, worship
 Skills: Mission, fatherhood

1. The father-child relationship teaches us that there are authorities in life we need to respond to. Our success depends on how much we can learn from them and be shaped by their concern and oversight in our lives. The father-child relationship shows the beautiful blend of authority and love.
2. We are to respect our earthly parents and to obey our heavenly Father completely, as Jesus did. We obey even if we do not understand or question its value. Fathers are to rule the home with a compassionate understanding of their children. A child receives a complete picture of God from both parents, father and mother, who care for him or her.
3. Do I respect my father (parents)? Do I obey my parents completely? How do I respond when they ask me to do something that interferes with my plans? These questions can be asked on the spiritual level, too. Do I always obey my Heavenly Father? Fathers need to ask themselves whether they maintain that blend of authority and love.

• Shepherd - lamb: Reflecting God's love

Virtues: Care, trust, peace, compassion
 Teachings: Knowing God, God's love
 Skills: Friendship, overcoming anxiety and fears, healing

1. As the Shepherd Christ carefully watches over us, the relationship portrayed here is again one of dependence. The sheep desperately need the shepherd for care, protection, and general help. Only with the shepherd nearby are they guarded as they graze. We, as the sheep, are protected from many hazards of life when we follow the Shepherd's voice.
2. The shepherd in this case is Jesus, and He never falters in His care for His people, represented by the sheep. This does not mean the sheep are always protected. They can stray. The shepherd might need to use more drastic measures to bring that stray one back home. When we abide in Christ's presence, however, we are safe even if the wolves are hovering about. We can walk in peace even when others are plagued by anxiety.
3. Do you get anxious? Why? If you are worried about something, why do you not have peace? How do you trust in Christ so that this shepherd-lamb picture becomes real? In what areas of your life have you found healing by Christ? Be specific. How do you handle fear? Write down

one situation in which you were aware of how the Shepherd took you through a scary time. How can you use Psalm 23 to help you when you feel you are all alone?

• **Teacher - disciple: Learning like Christ**

Virtues: Teachable, eager to learn, discerning

Teachings: Christ, discipleship, nature of truth

Skills: Devotions, abiding, cult detection

1. The teacher-disciple relationship shows that we, as lifelong learners, must always seek His wisdom. This need and dependence on His wisdom never ends. If we are like Joshua, who stopped seeking God's insights before the battle of Ai, we will likewise fail. The Lord is our master teacher and compassionately desires to fill us with His wisdom.
2. If we are teachers, we have the excellent model of Christ Jesus always before us. Like Christ, we are a bridge by which God's will and ways can be brought into others' lives. Although we are teachers as parents and friends, Christ is our Teacher. We must also consider how we approach learning. We must learn to seek Him constantly for wisdom and help. This does not happen once a week but on a regular basis. A spirit of eager learning and the application of those truths to our lives wonderfully transform us and equip us for ministry to others.
3. With what kind of approach do we open God's Word? With expectation, excitement, and hope of making a great discovery, or with a subtle disdain for His Word? A poor learning attitude is shown in thoughts like "I already read it," "What do I need that for?" or "How can that old book help me?" Of course, if we are not good learners, our teaching will negatively affect those around us. Do we really believe God's Word is essential to our lives? Do we question whether God's Word is true?

• **King - kingdom: Extending God's glory**

Virtues: Loyalty, meekness, obedience

Teachings: God's kingdom, salvation

Skills: Responsibility, evangelism

1. The King-kingdom concept dismantles the safe and private havens that religion has conjured up. Jesus is king, ruling over His kingdom, which consists of His people. God's kingdom is growing and will clash with anything that opposes it. This includes all ungodly philosophies, such as materialism, feminism, humanism, hedonism, and secularism. God rules through our own lives. His kingdom is present to the degree that we, as His people, live out His ways.
2. We should recognize that God has a plan for this world and for our lives. It is our opportunity to exercise our wills by submitting to this sovereign king. He demands full obedience so we can more fully portray His kingdom. If we claim to be His people yet display characteristics of the world that oppose His kingdom, we should wonder whether we truly are His. God's plan is for His kingdom to permeate every cultural group with His truth. His truth is His sword, and we must live by it and declare it.
3. Have each of us put aside that spirit of toleration that says, "It doesn't matter what one really believes, as long as He is sincere?" Either we are for Him or against Him. Have you become a person of integrity, no longer ashamed to call yourself a Christian and to live it out no matter what it costs? Are you proud of Christ's kingdom, with all its glory, love, joy, truth, and power? When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone else?

• **Bridegroom - Bride: Love, joy, and service**

Virtues: Desire, purity
Teachings: Chosen, Purpose
Skills: Devotion, Works

1. The Bridegroom-bride picture is the most exciting earthly scene to contemplate. But there will soon be a wedding in heaven, too! Christ is the bridegroom and will soon return for His bride, the church of God. The bridegroom shows his delight and fondness by choosing just one bride, while the bride shows her love by committing to belong only to him. The couple's selectivity and delight help shape the glorious wedding scenes. Couples plunge into a lifetime of commitment. The bride is to keep herself pure for him, waiting for the time when he will come and make her his own. The spiritual truths inherent in this picture are as powerful as the earthly ones, but are often not pondered by an ambivalent bride (the people of God).
2. We are instructed to be pure. The church exists for a purpose. We have lost our freedom to delight in the world when we commit ourselves to Christ. Once that decision is made, many other decisions follow. We will serve Him. We will put away other things (e.g., worldly things) so that we can properly focus on our duties to Him and be pure.
3. How many times have you thought about Christ's return in the last few weeks? Do you love to think of Him? How many times have you chosen to think of Him instead of watching or playing some form of entertainment? Would you say you really love Him, or is it just talk? On the physical side, do you keep yourself for your spouse, engaged partner, or future spouse? How have you shown this to be true?

• **Judge - sinners: Living in a just world**

Virtues: Righteous living, mercy, humility
Teachings: God's Righteousness, Justice, and Wrath; Sin, Salvation by Faith
Skills: Showing mercy

1. This picture of the Judge-sinners is one of the most important truths for understanding our salvation. It is critical not only to believe rightly in Christ but also to grow into a strong Christian. The clearer we understand our guilt, the more we will treasure His forgiveness. The great Judge is also the great Interceder. Christ takes our place as His people and bears the judgment we deserved. We then live in His mercy and act mercifully toward others.
2. How thankful are you for Christ's work? It is a key question that shapes what we believe about God, Christ, and our own sin. The more we understand, the more we are moved to humble, thankful service. As Christians, our hearts are deeply touched by the Gospel story, and we live it out just as Christ did, even toward our persecutors.
3. When did you last act mercifully toward someone? How do you typically respond to those who are mean to you? When was the last time you were moved by God's love in Christ for you? Why should God allow you, a sinner, into His perfect heaven? Do you live by exact standards or bend them to suit your desires? When was the last time you lost something because you were rightly inflexible (e.g., not willing to lie)?

• **Priest - people: Learning compassion and prayer**

Virtues: Compassion, intercession
Teachings: Christ's priesthood, Salvation
Skills: Evangelism, prayer

1. The Priest-people New Testament illustration shows how we are to relate to both God and others. We are to relate to God through the High Priest who intercedes for us. We are sinners and need the pleading and purifying work of Jesus Christ, the priest. There is no other priest to help us. Only Christ has died for our sins and lives to intercede on our behalf. But we, too, as God's people, are to be priests to the world. The sense differs in that we do not need to offer up our lives as Christ did. Still, we must plead on behalf of those who have great needs but do not have a relationship with God to ask for help.
2. It is critical that we recognize Jesus as our high priest. He alone provides forgiveness through His work on the cross. If we rely on our own works, we disdain Christ's work. We need to recognize how far we have strayed from God before we can appreciate what God did through Jesus. Only then will we have the courage and motivation to eagerly tell others about Jesus.
3. Do we believe that Jesus died to display His love or to pay the penalty for our wretched sins? When was the last time you evangelized someone? Do you care about your neighbors? The nations? To what extent do you go out into the world and shine forth the glory of Christ? How much do you intercede in prayer for specific non-Christians?

• **Master - servant: Devotedly serving God & others**

Virtues: Faithful, attentive, serving ethic, humility

Teachings: Creator, Christ's servanthood, reward

Skills: Stewardship, spiritual battle, leadership

1. The master-servant picture helps us clearly understand how we should serve Christ and one another. The most important point is to recognize that we do not belong to ourselves. Even our money is not ours. We fully belong to Christ and are to do His will. As we dedicate our will to the Lord, we will discover many blessings in our lives. Without this service, we work hard and lose everything (e.g., Haggai 1).
2. We must carefully evaluate our attitudes toward service. We are often more aware of our roles than of Christ. We tend to focus on the work itself rather than on the one we serve. As we realize that our purpose in life is to serve, we can follow Christ's humble path and find great reward like Him.
3. We need to seriously assess our lives. Does the way we manage our money reflect that Jesus is our Master? Would He spend it the way you do? Would He use your time as you do? What are the last three things you've done to serve Christ? Were you aware of and joyful in serving Jesus? As a leader, have you discovered the secret of Christ as the 'servant-leader'?

• **Redeemer - chosen: Belonging to Him**

Virtues: Faithfulness, Loyalty

Teachings: Salvation, Election

Skills: Hard work, responsibility

1. The Redeemer-chosen model might sound unfamiliar, but only because we have kept 'redeemer' as a religious term and haven't adopted the common commercial sense of 'bought.' Every time we go to the grocery store, we are a purchaser. We exchange something for the item we choose. Our purchases reveal what we like and what we want to do. They reveal our life commitments. God chose His people in Christ before the world began. As we meditate on this, we are humbled to realize that He chose to set His special love on our lives (and not everyone's). Of course, as His people, we should recognize that we are bought. We belong to Him. We were taken from the rack of the rotting world and chosen to be cleansed and delighted in.

2. Lack of self-esteem is not necessary among God's people! God bought His people at the high cost of Christ on the cross. It was not as if we were worth much. We had defiled ourselves. But His sacrifice shows us how He hopes to work in our lives in a very special way. God's great commitment to us should bring deeper love and devotion to Him into our lives.
3. Are you loyal to God? How have you recently shown this loyalty? Have you ever considered God's special purpose in rescuing you rather than others? In what practical ways have you helped others who seem hopeless? Will you go anywhere, at any time, at any cost, for the Lord?

• **Cornerstone - stones: God's design for me**

Virtues: Dependence, cooperation, trust

Teachings: Christ's importance, nature of church

Skills: Working together (team), relating to others

1. God has a design for each one of us. That design is always connected to the design He has for others as well. This means we cannot fully understand God's design for us without understanding how He wants us to work with others. Like a wall, we are closely fitted together for strength, cooperation, and beauty.
2. Exposure to evolution and secularism makes it difficult for many people to naturally reflect on their lives as designed beings. Even when they do, it is often limited to the physical level. As Creator, He made us and imparted natural and spiritual gifts. It is our responsibility to use what we have been given in concert with others. We must focus on our relationship with God to help us be properly aligned in our relationships with others. Spirituality is never a 'God and me' solo flight. We are in this together. We must love God's people around us and be fully committed to them.
3. Am I as committed to each other as to God? How do I show this? How are my relationships with others? Do I value and treasure others? What happens when we do not get along with others? What did God make you for? Have you sought out His design for you? Are you excited and content, or unhappy and discouraged? What do you do when you are bitter?

• **Husband - wife: Faithful to my commitment**

Virtues: Loyalty, commitment, respect, obedience

Teachings: Oneness in Christ and church, marriage

Skills: Resolving tensions between authorities and spouses

1. Husband and wife demonstrate mutual commitment, from which intimacy arises. The marriage ceremony seals this commitment in permanence (called a covenant). This picture turns our thoughts to how to cooperate and work together. The husband and wife have their own special design and purpose, even as male and female were made separately and for different purposes. The husband is the leader and must focus on loving his wife, as Jesus sacrificially loved His bride, the church. The wife is designed as a responder. She follows her husband and is designed to be his helpmate. Her focus is on willing submission, just as the church eagerly seeks the Lord's ways.
2. In such a hostile environment, it is hard to keep a marriage focused on God's ways. Husbands must counter this ungodly influence and be strong men who rise above their desires and live with true commitment to God and their wives. Wives must also resist worldly advice and instead treasure the opportunity to find fulfillment in submitting to their husbands. God has brought us into a permanent relationship (eternal covenant) through Christ.
3. As a husband, how have you practically given yourself to your wife? You need to maintain a balanced role, enabling her to focus on her home and motherly duties while intervening with

courage when she needs help. Wives, do you respect your husbands and submit your wills to them? Does your church pray? When it prays, does it seek God's will or simply tell Christ what it wants? Is your church faithful in doctrine and in keeping out worldly ideas?

• **Vine - branches: Abiding in Christ**

Virtues: Anticipation, godliness, yielding

Teachings: Communion with Christ; chastisement

Skills: Work, prayer, Spirit-filled

1. This picture of the vine and branches speaks about intimacy and how the best things in life come from intimate relationships. Our well-being and fruitfulness depend on how we intentionally draw close to and remain close to the Lord. God intends there to be a close relationship between Him and us. To help that relationship grow, He will 'adjust' our lives to help us, whether we are being stubborn or attentive to Him.
2. Deep, quiet trust should mark our relationship with Christ. Any fear would immediately hinder the growth of the trust needed for intimacy with Christ. It is both possible and good for us to fully depend on the Lord, despite what the world says (not being controlled by or dependent on anyone). We are made for intimacy and are fully fulfilled when we actively seek closeness and make our will His.
3. How have I experienced intimacy in earthly relationships? Do I trust others, or am I marked by distrust and secrecy? Can I be fully myself before others? Have I adjusted my life so that I spend time with the Lord each day? Do I abide in Him? Do I fully enjoy seeking His will, as Christ did His Father's, no matter what He says?