



How to Train an Intensive Discippler of Others (AKA: A Philosophy of Education)

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"And many years from now

Long after we are gone

These trees will spread their branches out

And bless the dawn"

— Andrew Peterson, "Planting Trees"

What an incredible privilege to train others to be disciplers, but it becomes even more exciting when we realize we are training those who will pass on the training to others (2 Tim 2:2). We get to equip the equippers all over the world! In light of this, we desire to be unified in how we do so.

When soldiers are in training there is a set process to prepare them for rigors of combat. I would argue that training disciplers who deal with the intense issues of humans is more important and more complicated than the military training a soldier. Our training ought to be more rigorous because souls literally are on the line.

It is obvious from Scripture that the Lord cares about people as a whole and not just as a brain. For example, we are called to love Yahweh our God with all of our inner person and outer person (Matt 22:36-40).

As trainers, therefore, we must be concerned about the whole person and not just imparting head knowledge. The whole person must be helped to G.R.O.W. by: **Grasping** content; **Rigorous** character formation; **Obvious** relationship skills (competencies); while understanding the central place in Scripture of **Walking relationally alongside of others** (especially "one anothering" in a local church). All four elements must be present in a well-balanced training program.

Grasping Solid Content

"We have truth in a world of theory" Psalm 19:7 & Psalm 119: 130

Biblical counseling is based upon the premise that we have Truth in a world of theory. We have the greatest worldview in the history of the world. Academic giants like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R.

Tolkien, among others, have found their minds and souls satisfied by the rich truths of Christianity found in Scripture.

In particular, Scripture says about itself that God's Word is actually God speaking (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12). God has not left us directionless on a difficult planet that has been permeated by the effects of sin. Instead, he has given us specific revelation that tells us who we are, discerning the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, and telling us the redemptive and doxological story of history.

Therefore, it is our goal to give rich and challenging academic content. Students must see how we draw counseling implications out of the text of Scripture, so they are not led down the path of thinking there are vital resources outside of Scripture. It is imperative that trainees see how we develop counseling methodologies that are derived right from the text of Scripture or are clear implications from the text.

We must use books that are rich with Scripture, model proper Bible interpretation, and are sound in theology.

Our whole framework is based upon a high view of Scripture and scriptural sufficiency for developing a complete counseling system. The God of the universe has spoken through His Word and, in particular, He has spoken about the soul, mind, heart, spirit, and conscience and what is wrong with them and how to remedy the desperate situation. In the world of understanding the soul and why humans have personal problems, we have an urgently needed perspective and rich insight into the human experience.

This excellent understanding of content would also include understanding how the psychologies and integrationist psychologies have influenced the country where we are doing training. Our counselors must be able to evaluate other worldviews and be able to properly interact with them.

We need not be intimidated by the psychologies because our system is deeper and richer. Because Scripture is God-breathed it is living and, as God is inexhaustible in His character, Scripture is inexhaustible in its content. Psychology often claims to be based on science, so we need to train our students in how to evaluate scientific claims and in particular "evidence-based research." Epistemology is a key concern, therefore there are crucial questions to answer. What authority does science have? How should we view the psychologies? We must prepare them for integrationism and equip them to know how to address integrationism and intersectionalism.¹

Love—Students must be taught to love Scripture like the psalmists (Psalm 19:10; 119: 97). For them to catch a vision for loving Scripture, all teachers must be totally committed to the sufficiency of Scripture and model loving and desiring Scripture. As one way to encourage such love all instructors and counselors must read and agree with all Association of Biblical

Counselors position statements.ⁱⁱ Students learn best when they love the subject matter, so effective teachers must not just teach to know the information but also stir students to love biblical counseling and the God of biblical counseling.ⁱⁱⁱ

A Godward focus—All in life is about the glory of God and, to find out how to live this God-glorifying life, one must listen to God’s voice in the Bible. It will bring glory to God, if we demonstrate we are following Him and teaching others to do so in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). It glorifies God when we use our minds in God-honoring ways and teach our students to think wisely and well (Phil 4:8). To help students to think, we teach not just what to think but how to think, how to evaluate, how to be discerning. This can be modeled by asking challenging questions and giving assignments that require them to evaluate thinking.

Gospel—The greatest gift we can give any culture around the world is a clear message of what is the problem with mankind, how this has impacted our relationship with our Creator, and what He did to remedy our greatest need. Our presentations of the gospel must be clear that we are calling precious people around the world to turn from their own idolatry through repentance and place their faith in Christ alone as the payment for sin. They must believe not only that He paid the price for their sin but rose again to defeat sin and death. The gospel is not just a message to believe but a person to follow so, when a person repents, he or she becomes a follower of the Master. In fulfillment of the Great Commission, we are calling individuals to become followers of our Lord.

Rigorous Character Development

It is equally as important that the inner person of our trainees be purposefully developed toward Christlikeness.

Even though our whole system is based on Truth with a capital T and content is the foundation of our system, a counselor who has not grown to apply the principles taught by OIC is inconsistent. We do not desire to produce counselors who are potentially hypocritical. We must have counselors who not only know truth but are equally strong in grace, just as our Lord was “full of grace and truth.”

It is much easier though to learn academic content than it is to train a heart. A head can be filled with proper information while the heart has wicked or improper motives. In fact, the most academically advanced seminary professor still has remnant sin.

Therefore, we must look at our training more as mentorship than lectureship. Our trainees are apprentices, not just people sitting in rows absorbing information. We must include regular personal sanctification projects throughout our curriculum. It can be devastating to ministries

when a biblical counselor has not grown to apply biblical truth to his or her own life. This takes purposeful effort not just for the trainee but also the teacher to mentor future counselors toward spiritual growth.

It is a particular weakness in typical biblical counseling training that future counselors do not understand their own heart desire/false worship tendencies. For example, if a counselor has not realized his tendency toward being controlling, he may dominate counseling sessions. If a counselor does not understand her propensity toward people pleasing, she will have a hard time saying hard things to counselees.

We must disciple/mentor our future counselors to be heart aware. There are great advantages to having students do personal growth projects. Through mentored sanctification, future counselors also see the effort it is going to take for counselees to do homework or grow spiritually.

Love—Counselors as disciplers must be people of Christ-like character and if there is any word that captures God’s character it is love. “Love one another” is the most often repeated command in the New Testament and our Lord says this is the way the world will know we are His disciples. Personal growth in dying to self and loving God and others needs to be encouraged regularly in our training. To serve others as counseling requires, our training must encourage selflessness/sacrificial service. Humans are naturally selfish so we must be purposeful in mentoring our students toward self-giving love that is moved with compassion toward others (Matt 9:36; Col 3:12).

A Godward focus—One of the greatest gifts we can give our trainees around the world is a Godward focus in their inner persons. Christianity has a bent toward behaviorism and it is easy to turn the Christian life into a list of rituals, rules, and events, rather than an inner disposition of worship throughout the day. Our trainees must know that “whether we eat or drink or whatever we do we do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). This is not just outward actions but an inward attitude of the affections.

Gospel—Our Savior was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We must train Christlike counselors, therefore, who are gracious and merciful, just as our Father in heaven is merciful. We must train counselors who are kind (not harsh) because “the kindness of God leads us to repentance”(Rom 2:4). Our trainees must be gospel saturated not only in knowing the gospel message but, just as importantly, in their characters.

Practical ramifications:

1. Mentored personal-development (sanctification) projects must be a regular part of training.

2. We must work hard at helping each student understand their own heart propensities so that they understand how the desires of their hearts will influence their ministries.

Obvious Relationship Skills

Proverbs 18:13 “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”

Proverbs 18:17 “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.”

It is feasible that a future counselor could be a growing Christian who knows much about the Bible but lacks the skills necessary to build relationships, gather good data, and assign great homework. In other words, he could have content and Christlike character but lack competencies necessary for good counseling discipleship.

It could be argued, though, that if someone is truly Christlike, they will have relationship skills that care about other people and know how to engage others. If they do not, this should be addressed through the character-development aspect of our training.

A counselor who does not know how to counsel is an oxymoron. We not only train counselors in high-quality content and work on their inner person, for the glory of God, but we also teach them skills.

Skills, like being relational, knowing how to ask good-quality questions, knowing the counseling process, preparing an agenda, dealing with difficult people, leading a counseling conversation, and not lecturing, are crucial skills for a future counselor to learn.

Our training at the CLT and academic levels must incorporate skill practice. Almost every module or academic class should have some type of skill practice for future counselors. This would culminate in upper-level classes where whole courses are practicums in which skills are practiced and evaluated.

Love—It is loving to have good skills as a counselor. For example, if a counselor loves his counsees, he will be an active listener. This is a skill to be learned. A good counselor cares about another’s story and therefore actively engages in relationship building. A loving counselor listens so well that he or she can repeat back in their own words what the counselee has been sharing. OIC trainers must train counselors who, out of love, work hard on relationship skills.

A Godward focus—In Christ, God the Father moved toward us. The Godhead cares so much about relationships that the Father, at great personal sacrifice, gave His only-begotten Son for our salvation so we can be reconciled to Him. Therefore, it will glorify God, if relationships are

this important to us as well. We must train our counselors to be relational. A non-relational biblical counselor or equipper of counselors is an oxymoron.

Gospel—If you brainstorm words associated with the word “gospel,” you would come up with words like forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy, grace, and adoption. These are all relationship words and highlight the importance of Gospel-saturated relationship skills we must be teaching our trainees.

Practical ramification:

1. Practicing skills must be a regular part of our training, not just in classes set aside for this purpose.

Walking Relationally Alongside Others

Humans are relational beings and long for meaningful relationships. Our Lord has designed His Church to be a place where “brothers and sisters in Christ” can flourish in “one another” relationships. Even though we are a parachurch organization, our goal is help the Church fulfill its mission. We desire to see the potential of every local church unleashed for the glory of God to fulfill the Great Commission. We must teach students to be loyal to the local church and see biblical counseling as a local church enterprise and responsibility. We must help pastors own their responsibility to shepherd their own flocks, which includes care of souls.

Our students must catch a vision for the high priority of “one anothering one another” by learning how to walk lovingly alongside others. All believers are to speak the truth in love to one another.

In other words, our students must have a strong and clear ecclesiology. This ecclesiology must be worked out in the practicalities of how a church is structured to care for one another and how intensive discipleship can thrive in a local church. Praise God for the local church.

Love—the characteristic that is to be true of every local church is love (Rom 13:8). This “one another” command is found throughout the New Testament and is the most repeated. It is clear in the New Testament that loving others leads to holiness (Rom 13:10). Therefore, if we are to be a holy people for God, then we must die to self and love others.

Loving others through the church highlights the importance of conflict resolution skills being taught around the world. Many shame-oriented cultures seek to save face and therefore we must teach how godly people deal with relational tensions.

Godward focus—Our God, the great God of the universe, has ordained the Church to be His vehicle for the Great Commission. It will glorify Him, therefore, if we emphasize the church as

much as He emphasizes the church. It will glorify our Lord if we help fill the earth with worshipers through His chosen vessel, the local church.

Gospel—The central message of any local church needs to be the gospel. The good news is not biblical counseling. The good news is that our sins can be forgiven and we can be reconciled to God through our Savior Jesus Christ. This salvation then changes us to be God glorifiers who love God and love others, especially those of the household of faith (Gal 6: 10).

Practical ramifications:

1. Pastors must understand their role in a church is making disciples.
2. Church leaders must understand how to structure their ministries so that care takes place throughout the ministry.

A Closing Prayer

Lord, we desire to equip your saints to do the work of the ministry, but we are frail and dependent upon You. We, therefore, beg you to empower us by your Holy Spirit as we travel the world for Overseas Instruction in Counseling. We are passionate about your Great Commission and desire to see the earth filled with your glory as churches and leaders around the globe catch a vision and are equipped to do intensive discipleship.

ⁱ Intersectionalism is a term coined by Dr. Dale Johnson to describe those in the broader biblical counseling world who desire to intersect their biblical counseling heritage with the psychologies, especially in methodology. They seem to be facing toward psychology.

ⁱⁱ These documents can be found at biblicalcounseling.com and include the Standards of Doctrine; Standards of Conduct; Membership Covenant; Statement on Mental Illness; Statement on Gender, Sexuality and Counseling; Statement on Licensure; Statement on Female Pastors; Statement on Revelation, Guidance and Miraculous Gifts. A country coordinator should ensure that assistant teachers have read and agree to these ACBC statements.

ⁱⁱⁱ Country coordinators need to be aware that if training is being done toward ACBC certification or possible ACBC certification, then the subjects required in Phase 1 ACBC training must be taught by an ACBC certified counselor. It would be wise for country coordinators to explore with the national leadership how much interest there may be in ACBC certification before offering CLT 1.