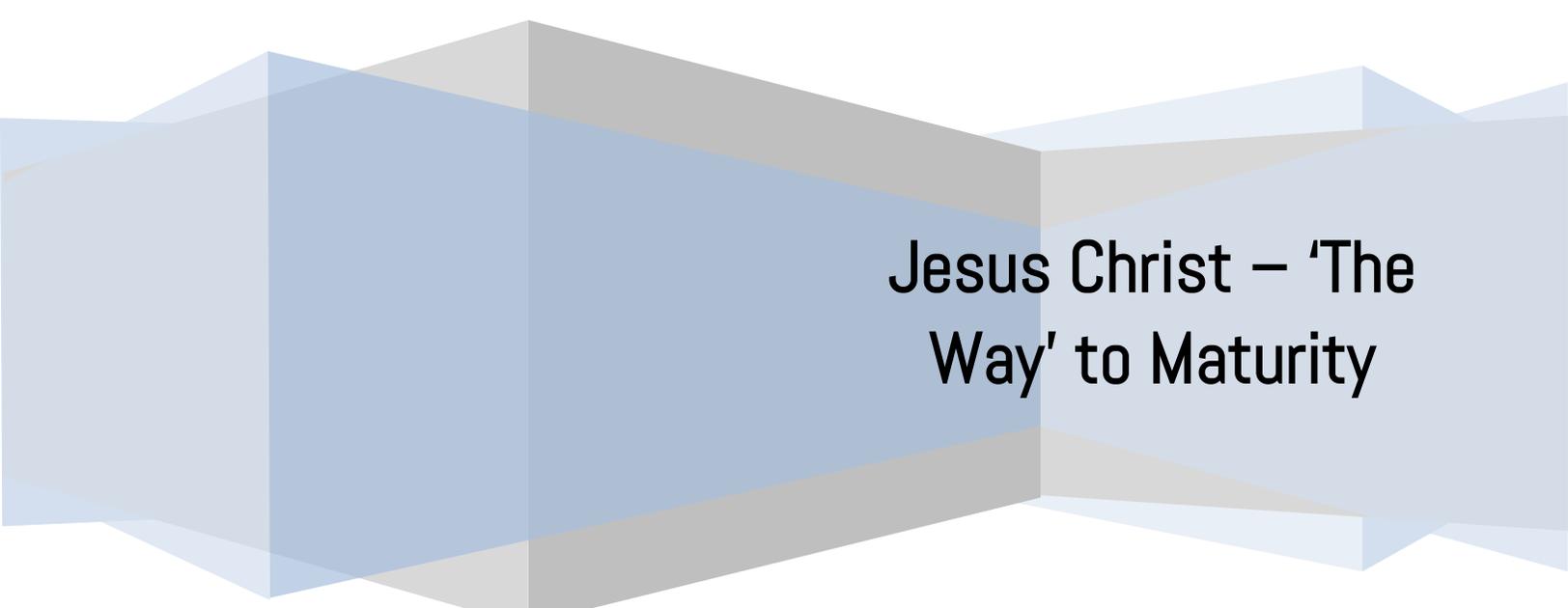


Disciplesplanet Consulting

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE 'CONTINUUM SET'

The Mandate of Maturity

By Shane W. Varcoe
2005



Jesus Christ – 'The
Way' to Maturity

Discipleship and the Continuum Set

The Mandate for Maturity - A Discussion Primer

By way of introduction – The following is not a fully formed position, it is an amalgam of spiritual ruminations, reflective prayer, and excerpts from my devotional journal over a number of years.

The purpose of this work is to present such musings to those serious about maturity and intimacy in their relationship with The Lord, and in so doing, to encourage them to see where it leads them in contemplation, rumination and prayer. The exercise is not to tell you how to think, rather provide some potentially new perspectives that will, it is hoped, propel or prompt you to reflect and, most importantly, pray. Where will this take you? Thrash it out in your *prayer closet* and then discuss it with those you consider wise in the Kingdom. Selah!

Openers – Please read the following Eph 4:11-24 and Col 1:24-29. Then read them in the context of their entire respective chapters and/or letters.

Ephes. 4:11-24 (NLT)

He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. With the Lord's authority let me say this: Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They don't care anymore about right and wrong, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed. But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ. Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual

renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true.

Col. 1:24-29 (NLT)

I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am completing what remains of Christ's sufferings for his body, the church. God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his message in all its fullness to you Gentiles. This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to his own holy people. For it has pleased God to tell his people that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory.

So everywhere we go, we tell everyone about Christ. We warn them and teach them with all the wisdom God has given us, for we want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. I work very hard at this, as I depend on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

To my understanding, the following are a series of key components necessary for the development of not only the walk that is discipleship, but more so the, modelling of and mapping out of such for the other – The potential recruited Christian *paraclete*.

Key One - Integrity

Integrity is often seen as a goal in and of itself, while that is certainly possible and even worthy, there is a greater end to which integrity is party and yes, central to, and that end is maturity.

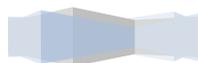
From my perspective, Integrity is a potent and inseparable combination of...

Authenticity + Transparency + Accountability = Integrity

It is my contention that without all three components active and engaged, it is difficult indeed to experience the completeness and maturity that this integrity will bring.

Integrity has a number of meanings including, whole, complete, mature and without flaw, so how do these three aspects work to this end, and with clearly flawed human beings?

Authenticity – the Christian expression of authenticity, at least for me, is a state of being both real and wise, but also utterly humble. I believe Disciples of Christ must be sincere (without wax)* and genuine in word, attitude, and deed. Of course, we understand that a person is practicing this in a developing maturity and will experience many faults and vulnerabilities in this process. This is where



* When statues in the ancient world were 'chipped' (particularly in facial areas) to avoid expensive repairs at the hands of stone-masons, the owners would use wax to fix the damage. After a coat of white wash, **only close scrutiny** would reveal the 'cover up',

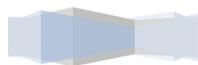
wisdom is necessary, not to hide the faults, but manage them. Yet manage them in a way that does not impugn the second quality of the components of integrity. This is why humility is imperative. We must be able to fully acknowledge and function in a place that does not allow pride the opportunity to manufacture, via spurious wisdom, a façade that makes us appear to be what we are not, or attempts to conceal such faults for the purpose of maintaining a 'good reputation'. (One of the first casualties of this action is our character, which God so highly prizes) This, of course, is why the second criterion for integrity is **transparency**.

Transparency – is quite simply being 'see-through', even if it means what is seen is less than flattering or even un-Godly. John *the Beloved*, writes so revealingly in his first epistle Chapter one verses 8-9. *"If we say we have no sin, then the Truth is not in us (liars in fact), but if we own up to what God already knows, (that God is right and we are wrong) then He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* This means we are not attempting to conceal any error, but always seeking that we be clean and clear so that when people see through us, they see that the goodness in us is only due to our Lord and Saviour – Jesus. However, for these qualities to not only develop yet more importantly realise their goal, there must be the ensuing quality of **accountability**.

Accountability – it has been said by some in the arena of motivational coaching, an inappropriate method for self-actualisation and focus should only be on responsibility. Yet this is one of the key differences between pursuing Jesus Christ and those pursuing the 'being all you can be' behaviorist rooted philosophy. We, as servants of Christ, are not on a journey of 'self-actualisation', rather, we are on a journey of submission to our Creator and Saviour's ultimate will, which paradoxically brings us to the fruitful corollary that we thought we'd find in the pursuit of 'self'. Accountability to the King of Glory is what will enable us to be responsible. In this place of submission, our entire beings are re-calibrated to understand what responsibility is. It is, in its purest sense, focusing on God's will; then people's needs – always being sensitive to the consequences and outcomes concerning the One we represent and how we do that in our role as Kingdom Ambassadors. With God it is never about *performance*, rather it is about *priority*. When we are **in Him**, then our priorities are His priorities and we eventually bear the fruit we were meant to produce. The fruit we so desperately and ineffectively attempted to bear in our self-determined performance.

A brief theological sidebar. The Psalmist exhorts the reader to [**'Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart'**](#).

Take-aways from this text can seem to pivot more on the readers agenda than the Creators desire. The play on words in this short verse are, to my mind, clever.



Many focus on an outcome; *'if I really tell God how much I like Him, I will receive the things I've been longing for!'* Yet, this acquisitional transaction model only fits in the materialistic prosperity understanding of our God as extravagant provider – Jehovah Jireh. Now, there is no doubt to that facet of this multi-faceted God, but this aspect is tempered but many other dynamics of this omniscient and eternal perspective God who has our utter wholeness and full maturity in mind, not just our ephemeral longings.

When we focus on the first call, 'delight' – *live in rich enjoyment unto amorous effect in YHWH* – then the outcome of the final words of this statement in Psalm 37:4 'desire of your heart', takes on an entirely new reality. If God is the priority, and delight of your heart, then the only outcome from that can be the receipt of more of Him; and that supersedes any possible material blessing we could hope for. Having said that, being ever filled with God, then fits us better to steward material resources. In this ever enhancing 'conforming to His Image', resources become better tools, and less likely to become distractions, or worse, masters.

It is all very impressive and even noble to purport to be *authentic* and even *transparent*, however, if no understanding or pursuit of *responsibility* (from a Kingdom perspective) is engaged then we just go on our merry way being 'genuine' in error and/or fruitlessness, with a misappropriated cloak of 'realness' attempting to disguise the unhelpful outcomes of unaccountable conduct.

At worst, we may simply declare that our version of 'Grace' will somehow cover our immaturity and error. At best, we may even declare that... "We are accountable to God!" However, it is John 'the beloved' who said, ['How can we say we love God who we can see and not love people who we can see.'](#) An inability to be accountable in this dimension is a clear indicator of an inability, or worse, refusal, to be accountable to God.

We all need consistently, and to varying degrees; Disciplers – (Role models, coaches, confidants and counselors), that can assist us in developing integrity and growing in maturity. As Disciples of Christ, we desperately need people to not only instruct us, but also reprove, challenge and admonish us, if we are to be serious about an integrity that will lead to maturity. None of these processes is about being 'controlled' by others, rather they are in fact enabling us to more effectively yield to God's benevolent Governance, the servant posture of a follower of Christ – humility – demands it.

Key two - Doctrine:

In all this we must develop *sound doctrine* to assist us all, Christian paraclete and disciple, in maintaining clarity, intent and discipline, particularly when relational and empirical aspects of our 'Faith walk/experience' are damaged, dry or perceivably deficient. This is no mean feat in a 'Protest-ant' religious framework, where critical analysis, robust pursuit of truth and the correct aversion to man-

made traditions and rituals can be hijacked by individualistic and at time prideful zeal, leading to excesses and potential abuses of authority in leadership roles.

I love C.S. Lewis insight in his evocative essay, *The Abolition of Man*, where he posited the following maxim; “*A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary for the very idea of rule that is not tyranny and obedience that is not slavery.*” The application of this principle in sound doctrine ensures all involved in the New Covenant discipling journey are protected from the abuses that ungoverned humans can bring.

In that protective context I would like to suggest, for ease of categorisation and retention, we develop a three-pronged approach in embracing sound doctrine.

- **Cerebral** – Truth understood via Biblical doctrine, history, structure, principle, and evidences.
- **Empirical** – Truth understood via practice, experience, encounter, equipping and/or epiphany.
- **Relational** – Truth understood via interaction, accountability and Kingdom community engagement.

For the purpose of this document, I define ‘Good Doctrine’ not as mere ‘polemic elitism’, derived purely from a one-pronged cerebral approach (as if God can only be perceived and understood by human intellect alone). Doctrine in this *sola-academia* space can become a one dimensional philosophically driven critical textual reductionism, often denying the Holy Spirit illumination, considering more the opinions of man through natural perceptions and discounting the declarations of the Creator and His supernatural instructions and impartations.

I would like to posit that ‘good doctrine’ is comprised of and evidenced by:

- ✓ A consistent series of well-defined and defensible Biblical assumptions, geared to sound rules of evidence and supported by legal historical proves, and scholarly accuracy in exegesis and as importantly hermeneutics.
- ✓ Behavioural ‘norm’ – in other words, that which is believed and defended is lived out in the individual/Christian community life. The evidence of the doctrine is in its implementation not merely its verbalization. This takes the work of the Holy Spirit in us, as G.K. Chesterton once quipped, “*Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it’s been found difficult and left untried.*” In other words, we need God in us to live our right doctrine.
- ✓ Ultimately and of paramount importance, for the above to truly become the manifestation of good doctrine, they should be, must be, predicated on the life and teaching of Jesus the Christ – [The Word made flesh](#) – and reflect/express that incarnational model.

To move away from a mere 'maintenance' to a 'maturity' mindset, in all this we must teach the disciples of Christ to understand and view Christian practices in the best way so as to promote the fullness of The Christ and [His call to mission](#).

Key Three - 'Church Attendance' (Fellowship and the maturing disciple).

Many researchers of religion and the study of its decline and/or impact in Western Culture have consistently concluded that for an individual to at least adhere, with some consistency, to the scant rudiments of doctrine, one must remain in a place of a reasonable connectedness to the Church, as the following statement affirms...

There is evidence that adherence to conventional Christian beliefs recedes with time away from church...Among those adults who have ceased frequent church attendance in the last four years, 55% still affirm this range of Christian beliefs. The proportion drops with time away from church so that after 30 years absence from church only 15% still hold the full range of such beliefs. This is evidence that beliefs weaken over time without the support of a church or Christian Group.... Church attendance does not appear to be an 'optional extra' when it comes to the development and maintenance of Christian beliefs. ¹

Whilst it is clear that there is cerebral, relational and even empirical benefits of ['gathering with the saints'](#) ('doing church' – Hebrews 10:25)) it is my contention that it is the foundational assumption, motive and intent behind this act of 'attendance' that will determine the outcome, fruit and impact of that attendance.

If our faith, our relationship with our Heavenly Father, is viewed primarily from a *maintenance* perspective, then we will approach church meeting attendance as a maintenance exercise – refreshing the fading images via iconology, tradition, and ritual. However, if we see our daily journey with Christ as a relational experience unto maturity and therefore the ultimate conforming of ourselves with the image of Christ, then we will view the experience of church attendance far differently.

If it is with solely a 'maintenance mindset' that we attend church, then we will most likely present at church for the purposes of obtaining a *drink*. By that I mean one will merely come to get refreshed, a pump up, something to maintain a basic Christian function and prevent decay or death – or slake the parched spiritual throat. This is little more than survival. As much as that may be a real necessity from time to time, it must never become the default process. If it is survival, then it can become little more than make the best of this life until Jesus returns or death takes me – or simply because this is the sub-culture I've subscribed to and I need to keep some basic handle on it. On the other hand, if our church attendance is the pursuit of intimate relationship and maturity, then I contend that our 'going to church' will be more with a metaphorical shovel to *'Dig'*. I come to fellowship to dig, because I realize that my daily communion with my Lord and

Saviour is enlarging me and bringing me to greater maturity, so that I may contain, manifest and ultimately reveal more of the HIM.

Jesus Christ declared twice that those who are Born Again, denied themselves, taken up their Cross and are following Him, will have HIS spring and/or well of life in them. If we have this well within, then how does one become 'thirsty' or 'dry' in their faith? Of course, it seems to happen from time to time, but the issue isn't with the source, it's with the recipient.

"But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life." John 4:14 (NLT)

"If you believe in me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within." John 7:38 (NLT)

One vital aspect of the congregating to worship, share, be accountable and service is to help 'dig out' the 'debris' that is blocking this Well/spring. To help unclog us so that what is always there for the follower of Christ, can be released. This mode of engagement in fellowship is robust and perceptibly demanding, compared to simply taking a 'drink'. Thus, we often opt for the consumer mode of looking to be given a drink for our thirst, but this only assuages for a short time and our 'spiritual spring' remains blocked.

Also, it may not simply be about this remediation process, it can also be incredibly important in adding to, challenging and equipping us all further to 'do the work of the ministry'.

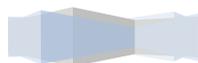
I believe it is the maturing disciple who comes to church to *dig*, the maintenance disciple comes to church to merely *drink*.

Pastor and Consultant Paul Scanlon summed it up well when he said, "*All of our resources are in our relationships!*" And indeed, they are from the horizontal, to the transcendent.

This leads to what I believe is the 'benchmark' of Christian faith – Whilst the proceeding is imperative, they are not the Benchmark.

Key Four - The Benchmark

To my mind the Benchmark, the 'plumb line' if you will, is time you – His child, joint-heir, servant and ambassador – set aside for communion and intimacy with the Master – Not time for life, work or even service and ministry. Nor is the benchmark your confidence, fleeting achievements, passions, status or even station in life/ministry – it is your commitment to intimacy with our Heavenly Father and Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



It is this intensity, (a combination of, proximity, recency and frequency; or lack there of) in our **relational** allegiance to Jesus Christ that determines the influence of us on our environment or our environment on us – our impact on associations and affiliations, either us on them, or them on us. In fact, the influence is such that we become either, a metaphorical *thermostat* – setting the temperature of our environment or we are mere *thermometers* – simply reflecting the temperature of our environment.

This **benchmark**, this key, is more vital than we often realise, for it is ‘intimacy’ ahead of structure, doctrine and even practice that *morphs* our faith from mere religious regulation, into restorative, redemptive relationship. It is this priority that will enable structure, doctrine and disciplined practice to realise their Heaven determined potential.

Now this is where it gets a little interesting! Prominent Sociologists Stark and Bainbridge in their seminal work [*Religion, Deviance and Social Control*](#) have observed that deviance from religious norms is exponentially less when a meaningful interpersonal attachment is made with an ethical and moral group.

Subordination to the ethos and practice of the group can be either strong or weak, depending on the extent of the attachment. If the *connection* is geared primarily or solely to the *ecology* of the group (‘ecology’ being factors that contribute to the environmental facets and make up of a group, i.e. activities, social connections, supports etc) then perceived negative changes in the group or absence from it will significantly and/or detrimentally impact the individual. In this place deviation from the ‘religious norm’ will be, if not inevitable, highly likely.

However (and this is where true Christianity comes into its own) if the relationship, the meaningful social/emotional integration, is not merely geared to the *ecology* of the group/tribe, rather to the **Origin** (source and Divine person of that ‘Religion’) then a strong and maturing attachment will eventuate and subsequently minimise, if not eliminate, the possibility of serious deviation.

Christianity, like no other religion is founded on the potential of a meaningful and interactive relationship with the Creator, not just a meaningful interaction and adherence to the ‘ecology’ of the faith (i.e. religious practices, Iconology, structure, rules and behavioural guidelines).

The priority of any Christian Ministry should be to introduce people to, and help them grow in, this personal relationship and to see it mature so **that the disciple is one of the Christ and not the religious component of Christianity alone.**

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you, I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything

stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord. When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren't you acting like those who are not Christians? Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we're only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow. The ones who do the planting or watering aren't important, but God is important because he is the one who makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work as a team with the same purpose. Yet they will be rewarded individually, according to their own hard work. We work together as partners who belong to God. You are God's field, God's building—not ours.

1 Cor. 3:1-9 (NLT)

When this takes place, deviation is near impossible, as the adherence, the attachment, is personal vital and developing relational one. Yet in the infancy of the discovery and nurturing of this relationship it is the *Law* (Principally, not ritually) that I believe can be not only a useful, but key element of this ecology when it is used as a *Tutor*, by which we can find a reference point and stability as we mature in our personal relationship.

Until faith in Christ was shown to us as the way of becoming right with God, we were guarded by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until we could put our faith in the coming Savior. Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God. But now that faith in Christ has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

Galatians 3:23-25 (NLT)

I think the Benedictines bring this particular idea into a sharp New Testament ecclesiastical focus in one of their key principles for growth as crystallised in the following statement...

"A LITTLE STRICTNESS IN ORDER TO AMEND FAULTS AND SAFEGUARD LOVE." St Benedict

This rule of Benedict is seen as a 'guidepost' or 'railing' something to hang on to in the dark, something that leads in a given direction, something that gives us support as we climb. The Rule of Benedict, in other words, is more wisdom than law. The Rule of Benedict is not a list of directives. The

Rule of Benedict is a way of life, and that the key to understanding this Rule is to know it isn't one!

Notice that these principles are **not** relationship and cannot ultimately be used as a substitute for it, however, when used in the attitude and intent encapsulated in the previous statements, it can facilitate a help and not hindrance to that burgeoning relationship. The 'hand rail' analogy is clever and if you apply this to the 'stairway' of Grace, then you have a powerful amalgam, of both Covenants working to the ultimate intent of the Creator – a deliberate relationship and intentional walk with the Triune Community that is YHWH.

To draw another parallel. [As with a child and/or infant, it can be 'related' by birth to the parent, yet the child's ability to relate meaningfully with, and interact maturely toward, the parent must be learned, and therefore, must be taught.](#) This is done in part, by using the 'ecology' of the Christian Faith to assist in bringing relationship with God to fruition, rather than simply relying on the 'ecology' to sustain the practice of religion, which has no ability to rescue, redeem or restore in and of itself.

The integration that takes place must be on both horizontal and vertical plains. By that, I mean there is meaningful relational connections in the Christian church and with the Person of Jesus Christ – To be effective and sustainable relationship must be both with God and with each other. As mentioned earlier, it is imperative that the 'vertical communion' (with our Heavenly Father) is paramount, yet tantamount to that is our relationship with each other. Both have the capacity to maintain and sustain the other, yet if over emphasis is placed on the horizontal relationship alone, then the ecology of the religion/faith will have greatest influence on our *walk* and faith. If intimacy with God alone (in isolation from others) is pursued, then our ability to spiritually and beneficially integrate with other Christians and the 'lost' (those not yet rescued) will be impeded. All this only adds to the potential for deviation, as the Enemy of our souls, revels in the freedom to attack an individual in the isolation disconnection can give them.

Churches must give strong and consistent attention to both relationships - the ecology (environment) and Intimacy (integration/relationship), yet the intimacy with Heaven must be the **higher call** if balance and clarity is to be maintained, and development, growth and impact is to be experienced. Ultimately then, the Disciples of Christ become 'dispensers', not merely 'drinkers' of God and His will – Conduits rather than mere consumers.

***"Let your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."* Jesus Christ.**

Pause and read 2 Chronicles Chapters 3-6 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-23



In our first world western culture, obsessed with image, veneer, marketing and profile, how much time is allocated to the *surface* and how much spent on the *substance*?

Solomon's temple was without compromise, incredible and unparalleled. Its fame and splendour resonated throughout history. The people who were privileged to see it were in absolute awe! Yet as impressed as they were with its grandeur and all that it attempted to represent – [The Glory of God – it all paled when God Himself showed up!](#) Every extension, representation and 'imagery' became as if of 'wood, hay and stubble' when juxtaposed to God himself.

Paul writes that we are [now 'living stones being built into a temple'](#). What does that mean? What Paul was intimating was that Solomon's temple is really a poor representation of us - His temple. Are we at risk of becoming preoccupied with trying to impress with the 'representation' that, not only others, but we too miss the presence of God? Have we become absorbed in the *ecology* of Christianity that we're merely donning the religious or cultural 'garb' to make us 'look the part' or do they see the Glory of God inside us?

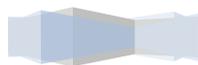
So powerful was God's presence in Solomon's temple that all ***its splendour, glory and majesty was relegated.***

The icons within the religious ecology can help us remember or bring focus, but on what? If it is to remember only event or even purpose, then we miss the ultimate intent. If, however, they draw us forward to intimacy, not merely back to ecology, then we will not continue to miss God's best. Are we loved or valued any less – NO! However, the risk is that if intimacy is relegated and 'form' promoted, it will be a sure fire way to see 'religion' increase and 'relationship' diminish.

"When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

Ephes. 3:14-19 (NLT)

How can He fill us? Whatever is empty is open to be filled, but how can we make room? By collaborating with Him in intimate connection for ***digging out*** the well.



So, how do we do that?

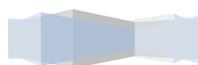
- Recognising and moving away from the 'drinking' mentality only.
- Consecrating - Set yourself apart to God first, then His will - seek, wait, watch and listen.
- Believing – Trust, yield and expect.

To help us grasp this more completely, we must go back to origins – the foundational commencement place. Sadly, in our egocentric culture many philosophies, ideologies and religious ideas that are pursued, are done so usually on the basis of 'outcomes' – *'what's in it for me and when can I get it'*. Sometimes even the 'operations' may be considered if of course they are not too demanding. When it comes to Christianity – or better put 'giving your life to Christ and following Him', it is first and foremost about 'origins', followed by operations, then outcomes. Unlike other philosophies it is not so much about performance, but proximity. It is not about requirements, so much as relationship. So, let us go back to the origins... I want to submit here that Christianity has tiers, tiers of experience, expectation and expression, but we can be deceived to believing we are Christians because of our proximity to the 'Kingdom and it's extensions', but these alone are not what determine our salvation, they are merely out-workings and supports to it.

For the purpose of this discussion I have translated the ideas of origin, operation and outcome into a priority 'tier' format to help us get some perspective. In this instance Tier one is considered the 'origin' and the others follow. From my experience, at least in the 'West', what I see is we tend to look for, or live in, Tier two or three.

Tier 3 – 6 Community 7 Support, 8 Resources
Tier 2 – 3 Meaning, 4 Purpose, 5 Direction
Tier 1 – 1 *Rescue* 2 *Adoption*

Many may start their journey toward Christ in Tier 3, which is fine from a 'seeking' perspective, but it is not Salvation. Even experiencing community, teaching and coaching may help us understand some of God's Kingdom, but here's the bite, no one, absolutely no one can come into God's family, be in God's kingdom without being adopted. Adoption enables us to become 'joint heirs with Christ', 'Children of God' in the relational, not just created sense – part of His family – this, however, is prefaced by the most important revelation, and that is the need to be rescued. Until we see and understand why we need rescuing then we can never truly appreciate how incredible it is that the Creator, the Author of life adopts us as one of His own. Rescued from our lost state and its sin stained and consequently, wrath attracting rebellious idolatry – yes, and that descriptor is grossly undervaluing our condition.



Without understanding God's deep longing for not only reconnection, but communion with us in His family, and catastrophic impact the rebellious sin that is idolatry has on that relationship; Without understanding God's Holy Law – His 10 Commandments – and all these proactive, restoring and protective elements these foster; we will never see clearly how lost, how desperately in need of rescuing we were.

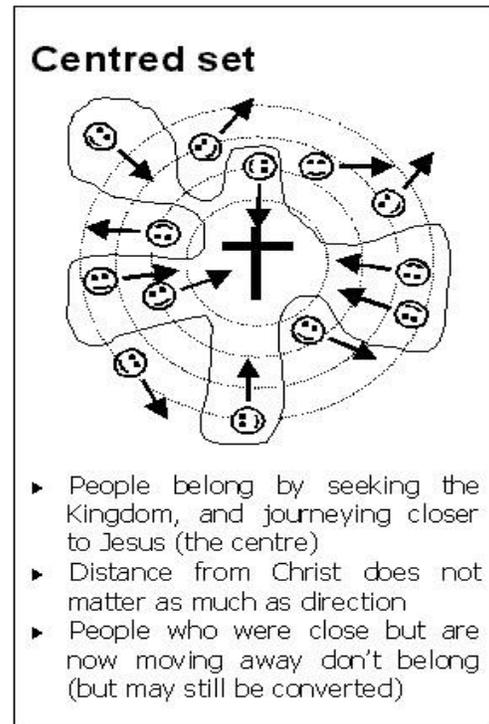
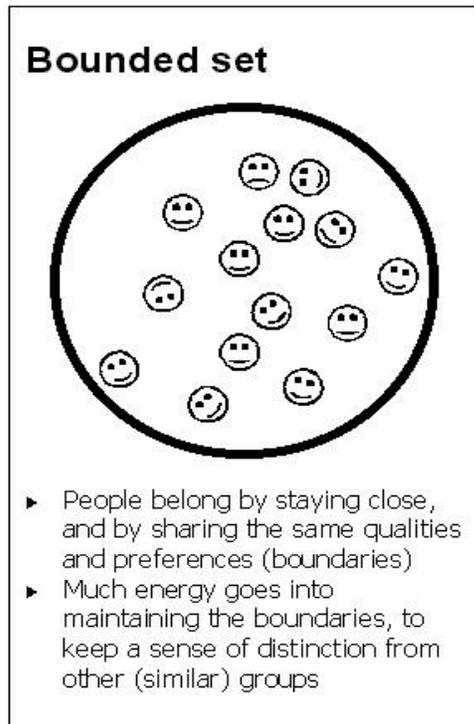
What of mission?

When it comes to mission and even aspects of ecclesiological structures, much is tabled about 'bounded' and 'centred' set models as the ensuing depict. Whilst these can be helpful in perhaps understanding the 'journey *to* Christ' or some aspects of the journey together, they may not be as helpful as a template for the intimate and personal context of the Soteriological journey that is New Testament discipleship

The key distinction is the journey *to* and the Journey *with* Christ.

Those 'seekers' of the Kingdom, are still on a journey to discovery, encounter and connection. However, those who are Born Again, saved, redeemed are *in* Christ and their journey is now one *with* Christ to the purpose of a deepening relationship with the Triune God and the subsequent manifesting of The Christ to those not yet *in* Him.

From my perspective, I contest that both 'Centred' and 'Bounded' sets are best used in viewing the pre-conversion discipleship journey but are limited when it comes to the post-conversion journey.



A New Model – What of a Continuum Set?

In my reflection I've discovered that many view the 'centred' and 'bounded' set model in the light of 'religion for salvation'.

For example, critics of the 'bounded set' would challenge that the people in the this model believe themselves to be 'Christian' because of their adherence to and a consequently 'bounded by'

- Denominational tradition
- Codes of conduct
- Membership
- Defense of moral prescriptions, etc.

Whilst these have merit, according to the teachings of Christ, these will not suffice for salvation. The same critics will in turn, declare the 'centred set' to be superior because it is not a static framework of rules/rituals to comply with, rather a journey toward the ethos of Jesus, and that this is somehow a better indication of ones 'salvation'. Yet both, from my perspective, are mutually sabotaging when you consider the following verse.

"Well then, if we emphasise faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law." Romans 3:31 (NLT)

The Apostle Paul in Romans says much about the paradox of the unity of these two – Law and Faith. Earlier in Chapter 3 v 19-20 the author makes clear that it is by the Law that every man is found guilty and condemned, and in Chapter 10:4 that only ***In Christ*** is the Law then of no use for righteousness. Yet in the above verse, we see that when we are truly *in Christ*, we actually end up fulfilling the law, not so much in letter, rather its spirit.

I'd like to submit a third model that may take us a step closer to understanding some of the values of both *Bounded* and *Centred* Set models without the either or, that set I call the '**Continuum set**'.

Scripture describes our '[walk with Christ](#)' as both a journey and a destination, but ultimately and always to be in the context of relationship. It is this imagery that differs significantly from 'centred' sets and 'bounded' sets.

In John 14:6 Jesus made yet another astounding claim. Not only did He declare he was the Truth and The Life but prefaced these by saying He was also ***The Way***. In Isaiah 35:6-8 we get a prelude to what much of that 'way' may look like... *"A highway of holiness, whoever walks on it, though a fool will not fall."* Jesus declared something of the nature, and in analogous terms the 'geography' of this Way in Matthew chapter 7: 13-14. It is narrow and by inference of the 'other' road described, ascending. This Way, much like the Highway of Holiness

is what 'transforms us', for in it the Life and Truth are discovered, implemented and demonstrated – not earned or performed.

Our faith, our relationship with the God Head and the Lordship of Christ, when looked at in terms of development and maturity cannot be effectively understood with models that merely speak of a journey **toward**, but must be examined in the context of a journey **with**.

This different context includes aspects of both Bounded and Centred sets helping the disciple **in** Christ grow in both relationship and mission, not merely the discovery of the same. However, the differences are clear. The Way is Christ and for the journey of both mission and maturity, the bounded set has application, yet it is what 'bounds' us that determines the safeguard. The Bounded set in this context is not merely doctrine, morality, fellowship and tradition, these things, or at least healthy Biblical concepts of these, are essential addendums to the Christian journey however, it is the intensity and frequency in proximity to the Christ that will see these elements have positive impact. It is important to note that these can also become liabilities when it is believed that the performance of these tasks alone ensures membership is paid up in the 'Salvation Club', but is this the intent of Heaven?

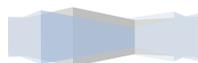
The searching out of the Christ and his nature, ideals and desires, may position you, at least from a directional perspective, toward the Christ, but is that of itself assurance of adoption into His Family?

The ensuing diagram (appendix one) is a barely adequate representation of what I see as the **Continuum set**. As you can see, it deals with those who are **in** Christ, not merely ecclesiologically, but more importantly **relationally**.

The Disciple – and this is the Key – who has acknowledged the person, claims and teachings of Christ as true and understood their need of *rescue* first, and then on Repenting and Believing has yielded governance of his/her life to Christ and have taken up their Cross and are following; it is these candidates who are *on The Way*. They have grasped and seek to fully understand what it means to mature in Christ.

References

- ¹ Bellamy, J, Black, A, Castle, K, Hughes, P & Kaldor, P 2002, pp 48-49, *Why people don't go to church*, Openbook, Adelaide



Appendix One (© S.W.Varcoe, 2005)

