

The Discipleship Wheel Illustration

Chapter One

Introduction—The Frustrations

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Goal

Be able to draw
The Wheel Illustration from Memory

Give me a man of God – one man,
Whose faith is master of his mind,
And I will right all wrongs
And bless the name of all mankind.

Give me a man of God – one man,
Whose tongue is touched with heaven's fire,
And I will flame the darkest hearts
With high resolve and clean desire.

Give me a man of God – one man,
One mighty prophet of the Lord,
And I will give you peace on earth,
Bought with a prayer and not a sword.

Give me a man of God – one man,
True to the vision that he sees,
And I will build your broken shrines
And bring the nations to their knees
George Liddell

A Word of Testimony

Early in my Christian life I began to feel the frustration of being exhorted to integrate Biblical concepts into my life without being told how to do so. It resulted in a mystical approach to Christianity which, in turn, created much frustration. I would be told, “Crucify the flesh,” “Make Christ Lord,” “Walk in the Spirit,” “Abide in Christ,” “Die to self.” I would be exhorted with many other sound biblical principles in the strongest emotional terms from the pulpit Sunday after Sunday. The frustration was that I was never told that with these biblical concepts came biblical means of application and integration. Thus, the deeper Christian life took on a mystical shroud. I would leave the church service with a willing heart, having received the earnest exhortation, and go out thinking, “Yes, I must abide in Christ today.” Then I would grit my teeth, scrunch my eyes, and in my most spiritual, mystical frame of mind try to make that transcendence from the flesh to the spirit.

“Be a man of prayer,” I was exhorted; and then we would sing “Sweet Hour of Prayer.” I went home, set my clock by my bed, and prayed earnestly and fervently for what seemed like an hour. I looked up, and less than ten minutes had passed. I prayed again, repeating over and over. Again, I looked up, and barely five more minutes had passed. To pray an hour would be a burden greater than I could ever bear. The great biographies were filled with men who seemed to at once after conversion spend whole nights in prayer, after which they would partake of food or medicine or revival. It seemed all one had to do was just decide to pray, and you were a prayer warrior extraordinaire. Yet, never is the discipline of prayer taught.

I would look at the preacher Sunday after Sunday and wonder, “Where does he get all that good stuff?” I would read the Bible and seem to forget it as fast as I could read it. It seemed to have no order at all. It was not written topically, so how was it that the sermons were not only topical but orderly? Christian bookstores were filled with more books than I could ever master. The pastor’s library was the same. Sermons came and went through my mind, and at three a week I could not tell you what happened three weeks past as that was twelve one-hour lectures. Lecture notes filled my notebook; but with no tests and no time to go back over them the information began to pile up at a discouraging rate.

“Just how do you master this stuff?” Well, the answer seemed to be either (1) go to seminary; (2) have some sort of mystical, transcendent experience whereby God just gives it to you; (3) simply muddle through, hoping to evolve into being a man of prayer; or (4) become a Christian clam—with mouth open wide as the spiritual tides came in and out, you filter what you can for your nourishment and hope it is the “good stuff” and not the bad.

I would be exhorted, “Take the gospel to the world.” So I would go out and look at the world outside the church and be overwhelmed. My feeble attempts to express my faith almost always ended in frustration. In fact, the most effective way I had of witnessing was to bring people to my church to hear the gospel.

It was at this time that I attended a Navigator conference. As I looked at the brochure, I almost shouted out, “Hallelujah.” There were listed the workshops:

- How to pray effectively
- How to do independent Bible study
- How to lead others to Christ

And the list went on.

At this workshop I was introduced to the Wheel Illustration around which this workbook is built. From this I came to understand and appreciate the concept of spiritual diagnostic tools—tools which not only help us understand where we are spiritually in the Christian life but also tools which equip us with the practical “how to’s” of discipleship.

The Wheel Illustration: A practical diagnostic tool of discipleship

Leroy Eims: “In the 1930’s Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, was working with a group of students with a view toward helping them in their Christian lives. He longed to see them progress to maturity, fruitfulness, and commitment. He tried to think of a way to communicate the bedrock essentials of the life that has Christ at the center of all we are and do. After a number of unsuccessful attempts the Lord enabled him to design an illustration which communicates the essence of such a life. It shows how Christ should be the center of our lives and we should live in obedience to Him and communicate with Him through the Word and prayer and reach out to others through fellowship and witness.

“The Wheel Illustration is a helpful way to remember the basic truths about the Spirit-filled life. The key to living that life is Jesus Christ at the center and Lord of all you do. With Christ in control life is balanced and effective.” (Leroy Eims, The Lost Art of Disciplemaking, Zondervan Press, 1978, page 79.)

We all use diagnostic tools in the course of our workday. A doctor has a stethoscope, thermometer, instruments to measure blood pressure and to check the condition of our ears, and more. With the use of these diagnostic tools he comes to an understanding not only of our problem (diagnosis) but also of the proper treatment necessary to affect a cure. We call this the discipline of medicine.

Read I Peter 1:6-9. In this passage a common diagnostic tool is used to illustrate the purifying of our faith by trials. This diagnostic tool is still in use today. What is it and how is it used?

In the space below list diagnostic tools which you use in your profession or daily life.

This is the Wheel Illustration which demonstrates the practical aspects of Christianity.

Go to the Scripture memory sheet in the back of this section. To the side, list the verses that go with each aspect of the wheel, connecting them with an arrow.



The Hub: In a wheel the hub is the power source. It is the hub which turns and supplies power to the wheel. So also in the Discipleship Wheel the hub is the center of power, and Christ in the center is the hub. Christ, the Center—the Lord of our life—supplies the power necessary for the Christian life.

The Rim: In a wheel it is the rim that supplies the friction for motion. The phrase about a car's wheel that says "where the rubber meets the road" comes from this concept. This phrase emphasizes the practical aspects of life. The friction, the motion, the direction of life in the rim of the Discipleship Wheel is "The Obedient Christian in Action." With Christ being the Lord of his life, the Christian springs to action, responding to the power source of Christ.

The Spokes: In a wheel the spokes serve two purposes: balance and power transference. In the Discipleship Wheel there are four basic disciplines. These basic, most fundamental disciplines of the Christian life serve to give us balance as well as to transfer the power of Christ to our daily life. Through the implementation of these disciplines as a result of the lordship of Christ, we, as obedient Christians, spring into action. Discipleship is driven by the power source of Christ through the implementation of the basic disciplines of discipleship which are Prayer, Witnessing, Fellowship, and The Word.

The above illustration represents a perfectly balanced disciple. Of course none of us exist at this level. Our true spokes are often stunted and out of position. When I drew my wheel for the first time, Fellowship was way out of proportion, while Witnessing was virtually nonexistent. Now the start/stop, hot/cold, hitting the wall, spiritual experience I was living out was easily explained. You can imagine the frustration I was living out as a Christian.

You also may be feeling the same frustration in your week-to-week Christian life. In the space below, draw a picture of the Discipleship Wheel as it is represented by your life from week to week. Remember, the above wheel is the perfectly balanced and implemented wheel. Yours should, by contrast, represent your week-to-week experience.

The Discipleship Wheel Illustration is not simply a graphic on which to hang words in order to help us remember them. There is nothing wrong with such graphics, and the passages and concepts of the Discipleship Wheel could be easily adapted to other graphics. For example, it could be a ship. The masts would be titled Christ, the Center; the spars, Obedience; and the four sails would be titled Word, Prayer, Witnessing, and Fellowship. This ship could then be titled The Disciple-SHIP. It would be very clever, and it would help us remember these terms. In the space below, draw a picture of the “Disciple-SHIP.”

How does the “Disciple-SHIP” fail to convey the principles of the Discipleship Wheel Illustration?

Another way we could depict these concepts is with a ship’s wheel. It would look just as it does in the Wheel Illustration, only the rim would have studs protruding for the pilot to steer with like the ships of old. In the space below draw a picture of a “Ship’s Wheel” illustration.

When my daughter Megan was in high school, she participated in a History Fair project which took her all the way to state competition. Since it was on the labor movement in the minefields of Colorado, the United Mine Workers (UMW) invited her to come up and present it at their annual gathering in Ludlow, Colorado. The mine workers gathered, she presented her talk and was given an award, and a banquet was then served in the UMW union hall. Mining union songs were sung, scholarships were given, plans for the coming year were made. Everything one would expect from a thriving mining union took place. Then I made a discovery. Not one person attending this annual gathering worked in the mines. In fact, all the mines had been closed for over a decade. All the trappings remained, but the purpose of the union had long passed.

Now consider the ship's wheel. It has a serious flaw. What is it? (Hint: What are the power source and the director of the ship's wheel?)

- I. We must remember that the Discipleship Wheel is more than a cute illustration to help us remember six words and twelve verses. Rather, it is an illustration that conveys to us a crucial theological and doctrinal concept of discipleship—the lordship, authority, and power of Christ. Secondly, it was developed not that we might simply remember, but rather that we might submit, obey, and implement this theological and doctrinal principle of discipleship in our daily lives.

Let us, therefore, revisit the Discipleship Wheel Illustration.

- A. What is the purpose of the hub in a wheel?

- B. How is this depicted in the Discipleship Wheel?

- C. What two primary purposes do spokes serve in a wheel?

- D. How is this depicted in the Discipleship Wheel?
- E. This illustration is not just a picture on which you hang words. It serves a purpose. How would changing the illustration of the Discipleship Wheel from a wagon wheel to a ship's wheel drastically change the meaning of the illustration?

II. Next, consider the Disciple-SHIP Illustration. In the illustration of the Disciple-SHIP it is easy to take control and then make the Word, Prayer, Witnessing, and Fellowship take Christ where we want Him to go. The captain of the ship—man—takes the masts and sails wherever he wants them to go. This illustration is fine as long as we do not think about it too much. Neither the Ship's Wheel Illustration nor the Disciple-SHIP Illustration truly represent the doctrinal and practical truths taught in the Discipleship Wheel Illustration. Christ is the power source of the Wheel. Thus, the concept of the Wheel is very important. It is not merely a picture to help us remember words. It is also an illustration of the important doctrine that it was God's intention that the lordship of Christ be synonymous with our salvation and our day-to-day functioning as Christ's disciples. The terms and verses were never meant to be simply useful words which we can use to teach and to talk about, but rather they are to illustrate an important doctrinal truth of our salvation.

- A. In I Corinthians 8:1 the Holy Spirit warns us about knowledge for knowledge's sake. What warning is given?
- B. In John 14:15 we learn that action does not follow knowledge. Rather, what does action follow?

Roy Robertson: “Discipline. We want its results—the sweet honey of victory, the glory, and the excellence. Yet, we shy away from the pain that is a necessary part of discipline. We look for an easier way.” (Roy Robertson, The Timothy Principle, Nav Press, 1986, page 19.)

- I. This illustration then is not something just to memorize and put on the wall. Rather, it is a diagnostic tool. Hebrews 4:12 explains how the Word of God is to work in our lives. In the space below write how God’s Word is to work in our lives according to Hebrews 4:12.

- J. Go back and look at the Discipleship Wheel which you drew to illustrate your week-to-week life. Circle those areas which you are dissatisfied with. As you evaluate your own “Wheel,” what areas do you need to begin to work on? Allow the Word of God to convict the thoughts and intentions of your heart. Write out what His Word speaks to you in terms of your week-to-week life.

- K. Two questions now arise:
 1. Is Christ in my life? Have I truly received Christ or have I been simply trying to live out a religious life based on His teachings? Have I truly experienced the New Birth that I might rely upon and be directed by Christ as the Center,

 2. What must I now do to respond correctly to the authority of Christ in my life? As His disciple what changes must be made to allow for those God-ordained disciplines to bring my life more fully into conformity with His lordship and allow me to experience His power in my day-to-day life?”

Now you have seen how this diagnostic tool can be used in your life. As you begin responding to God’s Word in these areas, another person may come to you and say, “Will you please disciple me?” In the past you would not know how to respond. You might just meet with this person and let them whine to you about their problems in life or ask you all the hard questions they have. Now you can show them the Wheel. You can have them diagnose their life as a disciple and start them down the road of a disciplined disciple of Christ. Instead of talking about problems you will give them the disciplines to experience the power of God in their everyday situations.

It is not uncommon for Christians to fall back on the closed-door/opened-door philosophy of decision making. Unfortunately, this often is just another form of existential methodology. Existentialism teaches that the highest good is peace and prosperity. Thus, in making a decision their model is based upon personal peace and prosperity. For the Christian this plays out as, “God opened the door. I had peace about it (it is something I really want to do) and something good will happen to me.” Or “God closed the door. I do not have peace about it (it is something I don’t want to do) and something bad will happen.” This is nothing more than a glorified existential model cloaked in religious terminology.

Take, for example, Joe Pagan. He is ready for a career change and he has three choices of cities. His model would look something like this.

	San Diego	Cleveland	Denver
Peace			
Prosperity			

Joe loves to snow ski and has the ambition of retiring comfortably at 50, giving himself to his leisure and sports pursuits. He is very conscious about style and appearance.

The position in San Diego meets his financial goals, but the leisure sports are as far from skiing as one could imagine. Therefore, under San Diego place a “+” by Prosperity and a “-” by Peace.

When he visits Cleveland, the job is well paying but goes no where. The chances of rapid movement up the corporate ladder are small. Cleveland not only does not have ski slopes, but the city itself does not meet Joe’s image. He does not want Cleveland on his letterhead. Under Cleveland place a “-” by both Peace and Prosperity.

Denver, however, is another story. Not only is the corporate office near the slopes, but also the whole business atmosphere is built around skiing. They have several timeshare condos that come as executive benefits, and all out-of-town conferences are scheduled at ski resorts. The company is on the fast track, and Joe would have the inside lane. Under Denver place “+’s” by both Peace and Prosperity.

	San Diego	Cleveland	Denver
Kingdom			
Righteousness			

Pete visits San Diego. It has good churches with excellent outreach and discipleship programs and good youth and children ministries; but he is concerned about the atmosphere in the office. The sexual promiscuity of the West Coast is very much evident with a strong homosexual presence on the staff. It is made clear to Pete that business, partying, and questionable business practices and associations are part and parcel with this job, along with good pay and benefits which only a man of the world would consider as a good deal. Place a “+” in the Kingdom row under San Diego but a “-” by Righteousness.

Next, Pete visits the Denver office. It is run by a highly ethical supervisor. He has no problem with Pete’s religious convictions and high moral standards. The office atmosphere is no nonsense, and it is a highly efficient workplace with a strong unified team. Joe feels like his testimony is secure in this atmosphere. Churches are another matter all together. The management team is expected to live in the suburbs in the same section of town as the plant and the airport. The nearest strong Bible teaching church is on the other side of town, a good hour’s drive away. Even at that, Pete senses few opportunities of service within this church which has an established leadership and teaching core team. Place a “+” for Righteousness under Cleveland but a “-” as it pertains to Kingdom.

Pete visits Cleveland last. He is not excited about a rust-belt city; and it is far from the beach and the slopes, both of which are very appealing to him. He is not especially attracted to the Midwest, and the divisional office in Cleveland does not specialize in fields which he would choose if left to himself. The office has a practical, down-to-earth environment. It is not on the cutting edge and certainly not Christian, but Pete senses real opportunities to develop relationships. The supervisor is not opposed to an office Bible study, though it is a new concept to him. The team seems to be ethical, down to earth, and amazingly curious about this religious guy. This is definitely not the fast track for the company. Pay and benefits are adequate, but it is known for having a glass ceiling in terms of corporate advancement. The churches in the area are outstanding, and there are many chances for service. Pete immediately feels a rapport with the pastor of the church they visit in the neighborhood where they would most likely live. Their children think it is a “cool” church, and his wife is excited about the ladies ministry. There are many couples their age excited about the Lord. For Pete, “+’s” go in both Kingdom and Righteousness as far as Cleveland is concerned.

If Pete uses the existential closed-door/opened-door philosophy, which city will he choose?

If Pete uses the biblical model of Matthew 6:33, which city will he choose?

It is through the discipline of the basics—The Word, Prayer, Fellowship, and Witnessing—whereby we are able to maintain a Christ-centered, balanced life which enables us to follow Christ and His value system rather than our own.

Are you a Joe or a Pete? If you seem to be a little defensive of Joe, you might want to look back at your Discipleship Wheel. How does this wheel explain your feelings?

Gene Warr: “Though the word ‘disciple’ occurs 250 times in the Scriptures, it is used only once in the Old Testament. It is used many times in the gospels, sparingly in the book of Acts, and not at all in the epistles. In fact, after the Day of Pentecost, which is recorded in Acts 2, the words used for the concept of disciple are ‘brethren,’ ‘beloved,’ ‘fellow-laborer,’ or ‘saint’...

“The Bible lists certain qualifications for disciples. I believe there are at least ten:

1. A disciple must be born again.
2. A disciple loves God.
3. A disciple is a learner.
4. A disciple is under Christ’s authority.
5. A disciple abides in the Word of God.
6. A disciple loves the household of faith.
7. A disciple bears fruit.
8. A disciple must be willing to forsake people.
9. A disciple positively identifies with Christ.
10. A disciple must be willing to forsake possessions.”

(Gene Warr, [You Can Make Disciples](#), Word Publishing, 1978, page 39.)

Quiet Times Alone With God —Jeremiah 15:16—Chapter 1 Theme: Introduction—The Frustrations of Conceptual Christianity

Passage for Meditation: Philippians 4:6-7; John 15:7

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me?

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Passage for Meditation: Hebrews 10:24-25; Matthew 18:20

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me?

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Passage for Meditation: Matthew 4:19; Romans 1:16

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me?

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Quiet Times Alone With God —Jeremiah 15:16—Chapter 1 Theme: Introduction—The Frustrations of Conceptual Christianity

Passage for Meditation: II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me?

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Passage for Meditation: John 14:21; Romans 12:1

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me?

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Passage for Meditation: II Timothy 3:16; Joshua 1:8

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me?

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?