

Resources

Toolbox Central. A section on my blog with links to additional posts, resources and information about the tools as they are developed. Online at bit.ly/FP-Toolbox.

Sermons. A series of five messages that introduce the first four tools can be found online at bit.ly/RTExcursion and also on Facebook at “Road Trip with St. Stephen’s”

Three Minute Old Testament. Slide show telling the essentials of the Old Testament narrative using a simple map. Online at bit.ly/3MinOT.

Building a Discipling Culture by Mike Breen. Introduces discipleship and includes the Lifeshapes that much of the Toolbox is based upon.

The Message of Hope by Eugene Peterson. Peterson’s *The Message* is an excellent version of the Bible for devotional reading. This small paperback contains parts of the Bible in that version as an introduction, both to Peterson’s work and to the gospel.

Life Journal. A spiral-bound devotional journal that includes a Bible reading plan. Very good guide for journaling that helps you apply Scripture and collect insights for later use. Online at www.lifejournal.cc

Pastor Tim Online. You can find me on Facebook as The Feral Pastor, and on my blog at FeralPastor.Blogspot.com.

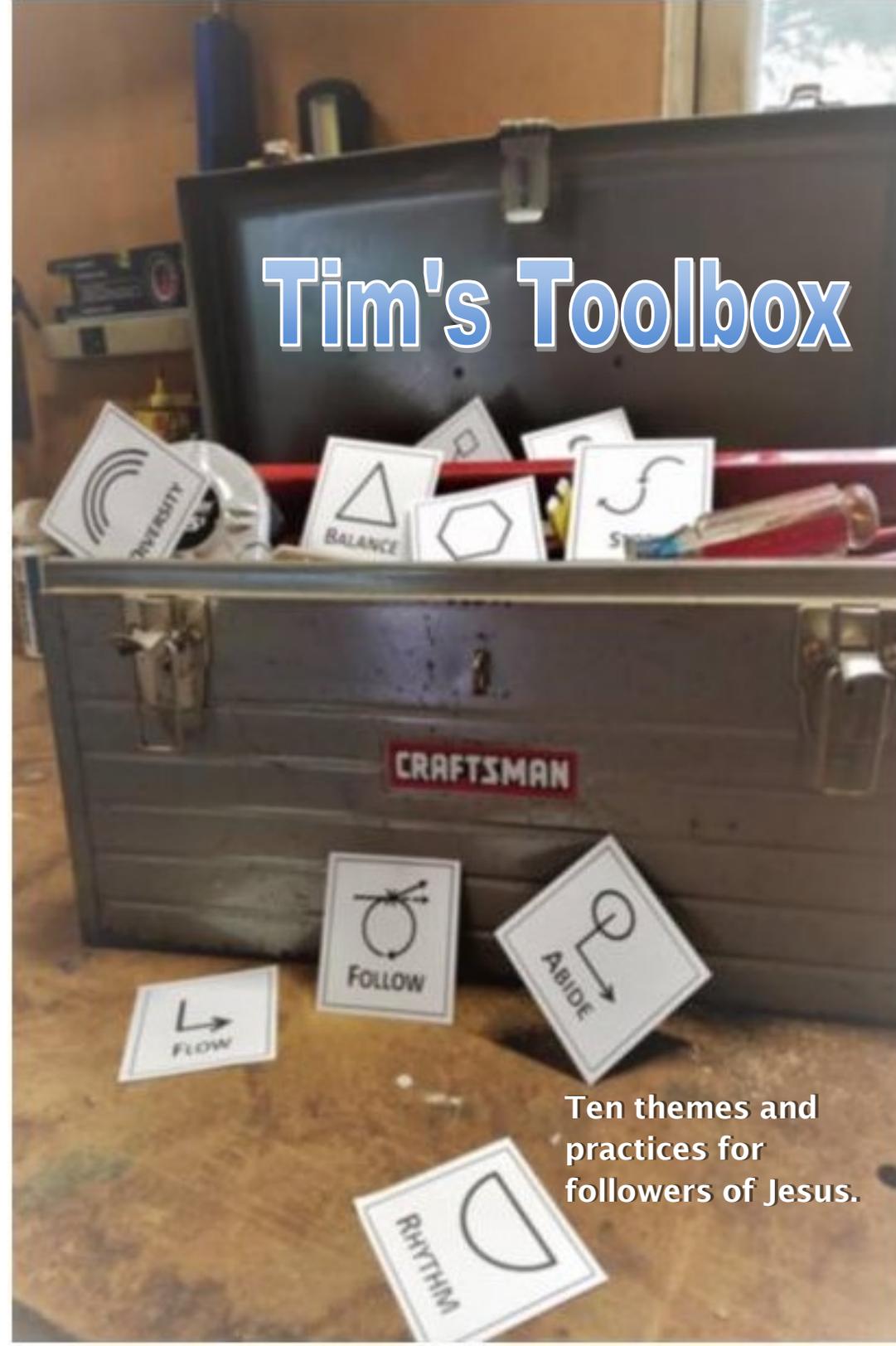


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Tim's Toolbox

Ten themes and
practices for
followers of Jesus.

Introduction

Imagine that I wrote a book for you, telling you all about the ideas and practices that have been the most meaningful to me in my life as a follower of Jesus. It would be my own personal toolkit so to speak. Now imagine that each chapter in the book had a brief summary at the end, recapping the most important points for you. Well, that book doesn't exist, but the chapter summaries do and that's what you're holding now!

Truthfully, I'm sure that an actual book would be more helpful for you to be reading first! These summaries can be pretty dense as they try to say a lot in just a few words. But better a summary you can have now than a book that may - or may not! - get written later on.

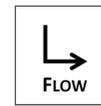
I am hugely indebted to Mike Breen for much of the good stuff you will find in here. Four of my Tools (Rhythm, Follow, Balance and Prayer) are taken directly from his own collection of Life Shapes. Two others - Diversity and Multiplication - are based on his shapes. So if you *do* want a book to read, please get Mike's *Building a Discipling Culture* and you'll have an excellent introduction to the Life Shapes and much more! It's a tribute to Mike and his colleagues at 3dMovements.com that they *encourage* people like me to share and build on their work without concerns over copyrights and such.

Finally, although I love to teach the tools, the Toolbox is not a curriculum. A curriculum is about content one is trying to learn, rather than skills and practices one is being trained in. With a curriculum, once you have achieved understanding there's a sense that the work is done. But in the Toolbox, once you have learned how to use the tools, that is when the work *begins*.

I pray that these tools will be as helpful for you as they have been for me! Blessings as you build a Kingdom life.

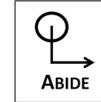
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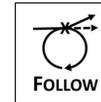
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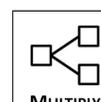
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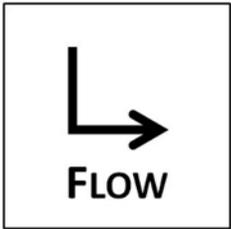
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Relationships are central to what it means to be human. We are designed to be connected to other humans, and we can't enjoy our full humanity if we're alone. We are also designed to be connected to God, and that relationship is just as necessary for us to experience our humanity if not more so.

These two relationships are not independent. Our relationship with God affects how we relate to each other, and our relationships with others affect our relationship with God. A simple and powerful way to envision this is the metaphor of an **L-shaped pipe**. We *receive* love from God and *release* love to others. The inflow and the outflow are connected, two parts of one thing. We are **conduits** for God, and "flow" is what we experience as joy, meaning and purpose in our lives.



In the Pipe metaphor, flow is driven by pressure not suction. As it says in **1 John 4:19** "We love because he **first** loved us." When Jesus says in **John 15:5** "I am the vine; you are the branches" it's clear that branches don't get fed because they first bear fruit; they are fed by the vine and fruit grows as a result. Life in God has a "**because/therefore**" movement rather than an "if/then" requirement. This is at the heart of what the word "**grace**" means.

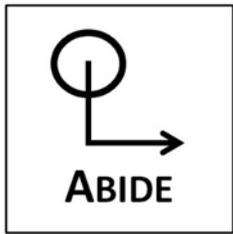
Unrestricted flow is God's design and intention for our life together. But life as we live it now is full of "**plumbing problems**" that disrupt the flow of love, both to us and through us to others. Problems at *either* end effect the flow both in and out.

People can be wounded by others spiritually, emotionally and physically. Things that happen to you can put "**dents**" in your pipe that make it harder for you to receive and to give love. We can also impede our own flow. "**Clogs**" of bitterness, anger jealousy and such can form inside us, often in response to the dents inflicted by others. The results may look the same (reduced flow) but the causes are very different and they need very different kinds of repair work. People with dents need healing, while those of us with spiritual clogs need... Drano or Roto-Rooter!

Other spiritual plumbing problems can also be recognized with the Pipe. A person who is caring for others but neglecting their own family might be said to have "**leaks**" in their pipe. Someone who is deeply alienated from God could have a "**break**" that disconnects them from the source. People who are profoundly self-centered are like Pipes **bent** from the L-shape into a closed circle: they want to depend only on themselves, and direct all their outflow back to their own desires and hungers.

In the Pipe metaphor, Jesus is an example for us of what unhindered flow and full connection to God looks like. But more importantly, we believe that Jesus is not merely an example from the past but also a resurrected, living, active and healing presence in our lives now. He is the Master Plumber who is at work to repair us in every way, restore our flow and make our "joy complete." (**John 15:11**)

John 7:37-39 (Rivers of Living Water); **John 15:1-11** (Vine and Branches); **Matthew 6:12** (forgive us AS); **Luke 10:38-42** (Martha and Mary); **Luke 15:11-32** (Prodigal)



Jesus teaches us that love is the center of life and faith. His summary of what's truly important is that we should "Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and your neighbor as yourself." (**Luke 10:27**)

We are also taught that *being loved* comes

before *being loving*. As it says in 1 John 4:19 "We love *because* he first loved us." So the starting point in life is *learning to be loved*, which is surprisingly difficult for many of us!

Jesus uses a particular word and a powerful image to talk about remaining open and connected to God to receive that love. The word is **Abide**, and the image is the Vine and Branches in **John 15:1-11**. "I am the vine, you are the branches... Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me... Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." It's hard to overstate the importance of abiding for the branches. Not only is abiding in the vine what allows the branch to bear fruit, it's what keeps the branch alive in the first place! The Pipe metaphor points this out as well, reminding us that there's no outflow without an inflow first. That's why the icon for Abide has a circle at the top of the pipe shape, to focus our attention on the inflow first.

To abide then is to remain intimately connected to God and receiving the flow of love as a way of life. And as we live moment by moment, it's a sense of resting in that security. Abiding is what Jesus envisions for us when he invites; "Come to me... and you will find rest for your souls." (**Matthew 11:28-29**)

We believe that God loves us, loves us all the time, and loves us just as we are. But for many people, "being loved" doesn't go much further. It's something they believe, but not something they experience. It's like a radio station that is broadcasting all the time but we're not listening to it. How then do we "tune in" to the station? How do we learn to Abide?

The answer to that may be different for different people, and it may be different for the same person at different times! But a good starting point is to look at the beautiful moment of abiding between Jesus and the Father at his baptism. What we see there is Jesus simply listening, "soaking it in" as the Father declares three things to him: You are my son, I love you, and I'm pleased with you. (**Mark 1:9-11**) Jesus abides constantly in the relationship declared in those three statements. That relationship is his source of strength and direction for all he does and endures.

Learning to be loved can begin by spending time in prayer simply listening to the Father just as Jesus did. Listen to the Father speak those same words to you. Let it wash over you and soak into your heart. Physical experiences can also help us re-center on the spiritual reality of God's love for us. For example, pausing in the moment when the warm water of your shower runs down over your head can be a powerful reminder of the peace and well-being you have with God's love showering down on you. Wrapping a comforter around your shoulders can be a physical representation of God's tender embrace.

John 15:16 (I chose you); **1 John 3:1a** (children of God); **Zephaniah 3:17** (God sings over you)



If you think of the way a pendulum swings, back and forth along a smooth curve, you have a good mental image for the idea of rhythm. That curved path is represented in the semi-circle shape used in the icon for rhythm.

Physical life is filled with rhythms, like breathing in and out, the beating of our hearts, and the daily switch from being asleep to being awake and then back again. If we ignore these rhythms or try to override them life does not go well for us!

Spiritual life is deeply shaped by rhythm as well. Jesus shows us this in his image of the Vine and Branches in **John 15**. “Those who abide in me bear much fruit” he says, which is like the first swing of the pendulum from a time of rest into a time of being productive or “fruitful.” He continues, saying; “Every branch that bears fruit the Father prunes to make it bear more fruit.” That’s the pendulum swinging back again as we “cut back” on our work to return to the time of resting and renewal. From that rest and abiding of course will come even more fruit when the time is right again.

This is the fundamental rhythm in our spiritual life: the movement from abiding and resting in God, out into fruitful work, and then back again.

It’s important to note that while our spiritual life rhythm has two parts, abiding comes first. After all, it’s not as if the branch has to bear fruit *first* before the vine will let it have any sap! Rest and abiding are not the *reward* for being productive. Rather, it’s our being filled by God first

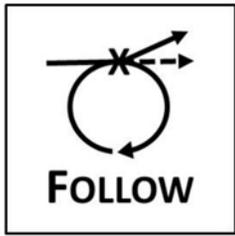
that naturally results in our ability to do good in the world. “We love because he first loved us” from **1 John 4:19** makes that as clear as can be.

Since abiding is so important to our spiritual life, it’s only wise then that we begin to *structure our lives* in order to protect our time for abiding. It’s spiritually wise to make our time for abiding into more than just an occasional *activity*. We want it to become a *lifestyle*. The way we do that is through establishing and tending *rhythms*.

A **daily rhythm** of abiding allows us to integrate our spiritual life into some of the most regular and powerful rhythms we have. As we learn to go into our work day with the deep assurance that we are *already* loved, valued and affirmed by God, we avoid the temptation to work our way to feeling good about ourselves.

A **weekly rhythm** of “Sabbath” rest has deep roots in scripture. It appears in the Creation stories (**Genesis 2:1-4**) and the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 20:8-11**), and Jesus made it a habit to take time for Sabbath (**Luke 4:16**). He also helped us to recover the idea that Sabbath is a gift intended to serve us, not a burdensome set of rules to be kept (**Mark 2:23-28**).

There are also rhythms of life that are not so regular as a daily or weekly practice. These are more like “seasons” we go through, extended times of work and fruitfulness followed by the “pruning” that lets us find renewal and new directions in life. Developing the ability to recognize spiritual rhythms, to nurture them and respond to them, is an important tool for us to have in hand.



The message that Jesus preached is summarized in this verse: **“The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”** Mark 1:15 Understanding that message is key to following Jesus.

There are four words to unpack, each one represented in the Follow icon as well.

Time – Jesus uses a special word for “time” in his message which is *“kairos”* in the Greek language. It refers to the *moment* when something is ripe or ready to happen. It’s not the “scheduled” time, but rather the “right” time, like the way we say “It’s time!” when a baby is about to be born. The message of Jesus is not just general information. It’s always an announcement of something that is happening *now*, because *this is the moment when life is changing*.

Kingdom – God wants all of life to be *right*: good, whole, beautiful and joyful for everyone and everything. Whenever life moves from the way it is into the way it should be that’s a little bit of “Kingdom come.” So to say; “the Kingdom has come near” means that we are standing on the edge, ready to step into a better world.

Repent – We usually associate “repent” with the emotions of shame and regret, even fear. But it simply means to turn, to change your mind, to change your direction. There is always a turning *from* and a turning *towards*. Jesus invites us to turn towards something wonderful (Kingdom come) which is why his message is called “The Gospel” (good news) rather than “The Warning.”

Believe – To “believe *in* the good news” means more than just accepting it as true. It means acting on it as well because “believe in” is a statement of trust. When you believe in a person you put your life in their hands. When you believe in the good news you put your life on its pathway.

With those understandings we can rephrase Jesus’ message into more familiar language in this way; “You have arrived, right now, at a moment when something wonderful is happening. Your life and the world is being set right, repaired, restored and released into joy! So drop what you’re doing, pay attention to this, and become a part of it.” To act on that message is to follow Jesus.

The Follow icon represents this message of moment and movement in this way. A timeline enters from the left and arrives at the “**kairos moment**” marked by the X. From there, we can keep going just as we were on our current path (dotted line arrow.) Or, we can notice that a new pathway is possible (arrow bending upwards) leading to **a better future** (Kingdom come.)

Changing directions is a process. First we “turn around” (**repent**, shown as the curved arrow going down) which involves *turning from* the direction we were going. Then we continue by *turning towards* the new path, not only in our intentions but also in our **actions**. The result is that we emerge from the kairos moment going in a new, Kingdom-ward direction.

Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus arrives at a “kairos moment” and follows Jesus into a new life); **Mark 10:17-22** (Another man chooses to stay on his current path.)



As followers of Jesus, we watch what he does so we can pattern our lives after his. One of the things we see him doing is intentionally tending *three* relationships: his “**UP**” relationship with the Father, his “**IN**” relationship with his followers, and

his “**OUT**” relationship with the crowds and the world. A triangle is an easy way to have a visual reminder of this three-fold pattern in his life.

In **Mark 1** you can see Jesus vividly engaged in all three of these dimensions. For example, in verse 29 we see that he’s been in the synagogue worshipping together with his faith community (Up, In). Next he’s spending time with his disciples at Simon Peter’s home where he heals Simon’s mother-in-law (In). That evening he receives visitors from all over town and heals many (Out). The next morning he sneaks off early to be alone and pray (Up). Once his disciples have tracked him down, he sets out on a trip with them to continue their training (In), visiting neighboring towns to preach and heal there (Out.)

From Jesus’ example we can see what it looks like to tend life in all three dimensions. And as in the Pipe metaphor, there’s a *flow* taking place. We receive life in the **Up** dimension; share, enjoy and grow in that life **In** the faith community; and deliver that life in service **Out** into the world.

We can also learn from Jesus that “Balance” isn’t something you *have*, so much as it’s something you *do*. Balance is not a *goal*, as if one could arrive at a place where all three areas are equally healthy and just stay there. Rather, balance is a *practice* of keeping all three in

view and adjusting along the way. Balancing as a *practice* honors the reality of seasons in life (as the Rhythm tool reminds us) and invites us into discernment to follow where Jesus is leading us next.

Here are some of the ways we might engage Up, In and Out in our lives.

Up – Daily prayers, devotions, Bible study and worship; “abiding” and Sabbath practices; talking to God throughout the day; mindfulness practices that make any activity an Up experience as we attend to God’s presence with us.

In - Spending time with other believers to enjoy life, build relationships and care for each other; discipling each other by sharing insights and struggles; getting together, whether it’s in twos and threes or hundreds and thousands, at work or at play.

Out - Caring for people in need; inviting and welcoming people into your life and community; introducing people to Jesus; making life delightful for others; taking care of creation; being a good neighbor and citizen.

The Triangle is a tool to help us see. We can use it when reading scripture, looking for the Up, In and Out themes to help us understand what we’re reading. We can use it as a lens to “read” our own lives, recognizing areas being neglected as well as places where strength and vitality are creating an opportunity for us. We can apply it to ourselves, and also to our groups and faith communities. But the Triangle is a *tool* for seeing, for helping us hear what the Lord is saying to us. It is not a *rule* we have to obey or force our lives to fit into.



Jesus' disciples recognized that the way he related to God was radically different from what they were familiar with. So they asked him; "Teach us to pray." We know his response as "The Lord's Prayer" and it is recorded in two different

versions. One is in the Gospel of Luke and a longer version is in Matthew.

While it is beneficial to memorize and recite The Lord's Prayer, it can also be an amazing tool for our spiritual life when used as a *pattern* for prayer rather than as a *script*. The Hexagon icon above represents **six themes** for prayer found in The Lord's Prayer:

The Father's Character. Jesus encourages us to address God as "abba," a term of intimacy similar to "daddy" or "papa" in English. Our prayers begin as we turn to our loving God as children turning to a loving parent.

The Father's Kingdom. God's intention for the world is life, love, joy, meaning, purpose and beauty for everyone and everything. This is what is meant by "Kingdom come."

Provision. Loving parents provide for all their children's needs, so we look to God for our "daily bread."

Forgiveness. We damage our relationships with each other and with God, so we seek their repair with the forgiveness that flows to us from God and through us to others.

Guidance. God is active in our lives, giving direction and leading us towards the things that give life - to us and to others - and away from the things that don't.

Protection. Evil is a reality and there are forces and powers in the world stronger than us. We look to God for protection.

With these themes in mind, The Lord's Prayer becomes *a way of praying* that we can learn and teach. For example, suppose a friend is having a personal crisis. Here is how our concern might be shaped in prayer through each theme. **Character:** remembering that our friend is also a child of God and that their life matters to the Father. **Kingdom:** envisioning the kind of life we know the Father wants for our friend. **Provision:** knowing that God is already at work to provide for our friend in their need and that we may be a part of how God's provision will be delivered. **Forgiveness:** for ourselves if we have been neglecting our friend's needs; for others who may have hurt our friend; and for ways our friend may have created or complicated their own crisis. **Guidance:** listening for specific instructions from God on what to do for our friend. **Protection:** remembering that we and our friend may encounter things we can't manage on our own in this situation, but trusting God to watch over us.

The Hexagon themes can also be used to guide us in *reviewing* our life to see where God may be asking us to direct our attention. Like a medical checkup where we routinely look at blood pressure, heart rate and temperature, each theme is an area or aspect of life we can look at. Where we're healthy we can give thanks to the Father. Where something's amiss, we can explore what needs to be done.

Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:5-15



People are different. That matters a lot.

We have different **strengths**, abilities and gifts that contribute to our uniqueness as a person. We also are unique in our **weaknesses**. Some people are prone to

making rash, impulsive decisions while others are prone to passivity or “analysis paralysis.” We are different in our **personalities** and our preferences. And we are different in our **perspectives** on life and the world: the information we have, the culture we were raised in, the values we embrace and the priority that some values have over others. All these things give each of us a unique viewpoint, and unique blind spots as well. Out of all these differences, unique **callings** arise for each of us, our particular work to do in the world.

We even have diversity in the ways that we categorize our differences! The Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator sets out sixteen personality types based on four categories, whereas the Enneagram envisions nine types. Different lists found in scripture are often used as inventories or typologies. Examples include the “Five-fold Gifts” of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher found in **Ephesians 4:11**, and the list of seven gifts found in **Romans 12:6-9**. The StrengthsFinder and DISC inventories are additional ways of seeing the shape of our uniqueness. Each approach can help to give insight by what it reveals, while also making it harder to notice things that don’t fit into the categories being used.

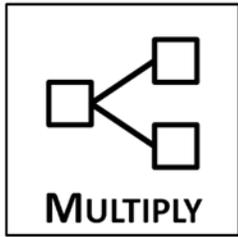
Communities are unique as well, each one with its own strengths, weaknesses, personality, perspective and calling.

It’s important to **know** what makes us unique, to know about the uniqueness of the people around us (especially family members and coworkers), and to know the uniqueness of our community.

It’s important to **respect** these differences. Do not judge other people based on someone else’s gifts or strengths. Do not judge yourself, or let others judge you. Some people worship with exuberance, raising hands and singing with gusto. For them, extended contemplation may feel oppressive. Others find their passion in silence deep within and may feel inauthentic or “unspiritual” if they are expected to worship like the others. Do not judge. Some people are called to feed the hungry. Others are called to fix the system that perpetuates hunger. Are the first ones enablers? Do the second lack compassion? Do not judge.

It’s important to **use** our uniqueness. Author Frederick Buechner has written; “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Finding the intersection between your unique gifts and the unique needs around you is all about diversity. It will also call upon you to decide *which good things will you choose not to do*, since you can’t do them all. At the same time, diversity is not an excuse for abdication. Sometimes you are the best or only person God has on hand to deal with a situation whether you are gifted for it or not! Part of growing towards maturity is arriving at some basic level of competence in your non-gifted areas.

Romans 14:1-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31

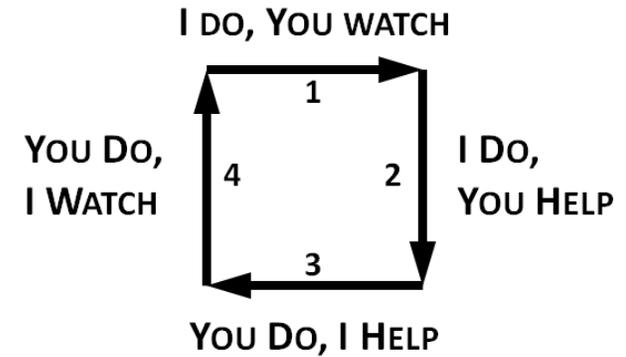


Jesus instructed his disciples to go and make more disciples in what is often referred to as The Great Commission of **Matthew 28:16-20**. These new disciples were to be taught to obey “everything I have commanded you,” especially the

command to... go and make disciples. So the goal is to make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples... and so on. This is not just adding more and more people to the group so they can sit at the feet of the original disciples and learn from them. This is *multiplication*, as each new generation is able to do the same discipling work that the generation before did.

“Making disciples” is something you do. Jesus didn’t say “teach them my new theology” but rather “teach them to *obey*” which is to say, *train them*. The goal is not simply that the students are able to understand what the teacher understands, but that the students are able to *do what the teacher does*. That’s called training. In making disciples, we train others to see the world with Kingdom eyes; to abide in God’s love; to love others in practical ways; to listen for Jesus’ direction and follow where he leads, and so on. This is not a specialized job given to only a few highly trained professionals. It is true, as the Diversity tool reminds us, that some of us will be more skilled at this than others, and that we may play different roles in the work. But we must not lose sight of the fact that making disciples is the common work we all participate in.

A helpful way to approach training is through a set of four stages, represented by a square. Training reaches completion as the student “moves around the square.”



When the student completes stage four, they return to stage one but now as a teacher rather than a student. The disciple has been discipled and is ready to make disciples. This is multiplication, not just addition, and is represented in the icon by one square becoming two.

The difference between multiplication and addition is important when looking at faith communities as well as individuals. Congregations tend to grow by addition, rather than by multiplication. This is a problem. It’s as if a family kept on having more and more children but never produced adults who could start and lead their own families. Eventually there are simply too many children for the parents to adequately care for them all and the family begins to break down. Rather, it’s both natural and healthy for families to *multiply* by launching new families. The same should be true for faith communities.

Mark 1:16-20 (Jesus calls his first disciples); **Mark 6:6b-13** (Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs to preach and heal); **Mark 6:30-44** (Jesus challenges the disciples to feed a crowd); **Matthew 6:9** (Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.)



Sometimes we think that the most important thing in Christianity is what we know and understand. We place huge emphasis on having the “right” theology, being able to explain and make sense out of difficult Bible passages and so

on. We are tempted to believe that everything can be explained, that we can understand every explanation, and that anything that “doesn’t make sense” must not be true.

In fact, there are things we *don’t* know, there are things we *can’t* know, and there are things we *think* we know but are actually completely wrong about. This is true in daily life, and even more so in spiritual life. When we encounter the limits of what we can know with our minds we enter into Mystery.

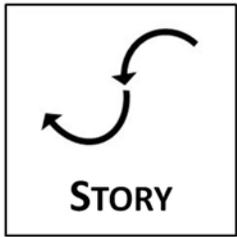
Not knowing everything is normal for humans. Even Jesus had limits to what he knew. He once told his disciples that only the Father knew when the end would come (**Mark 13:32**). And Jesus suffered with the pain of an unanswered question on the cross when he cried “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (**Mark 15:34**) Paul reminds us that at least for the time being “...we see through a mirror dimly” (**1 Corinthians 13:12**) and that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (**1 Corinthians 2:9**)

If our faith relied on what we know we would be in trouble indeed. Mystery reminds us that our faith is not about knowledge but trust. It’s one thing to *believe that* Jesus rose from the dead – to hold that statement as true. It’s quite a different thing to *believe in* Jesus as someone you can trust.

Embracing Mystery and accepting that our knowledge is always limited and imperfect can relieve us from the fears and anxieties about not “getting it right.” In fact, this is one of the things we trust Jesus for: not only are we forgiven for our sins, but also for our false, mistaken and misunderstood beliefs. Released from these fears we are able to “hold loosely” our ideas about faith and life and be ready to learn more. This also encourages us to speak with humility about what we believe to be true, and listen with openness to the ideas of others. Acknowledging Mystery helps us to resist the temptations of intellectual pride.

Embracing Mystery can also help us to set aside our questions when there are more important things at hand than just understanding. In John 9 Jesus encounters a man blind from birth. His disciples and the religious leaders are fixated on the theological questions. Jesus sees the man as a person, not as a case study, and heals him. We may want to wrestle endlessly over questions like “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Mystery reminds us to consider whether getting answers is really more important than giving help to someone in need.

1 Corinthians 2; 1 Corinthians 8; Romans 11:33-34; Ephesians 3; Job 38



For followers of Jesus, **story** is important in many, many ways. Jesus taught in stories; the story of Jesus reveals who God is and what God has done; the stories of Scripture are a treasure chest for the life of faith; our personal stories

are the way we bear witness to Jesus; seeing our own story as part of a larger story gives life context and meaning, and living in a story that we know ends in eternal life gives us hope and courage for the days along the way.

The Old Testament story unfolds as a series of movements on a map. Abraham and Sarah journey from their home in the East, up over the top of the Fertile Crescent and down into the Promised Land. That journey is represented by the upper curved arrow in the Story icon. Later, their descendants leave the Promised Land and move to Egypt, represented in the lower curved arrow. The story continues over many generations with a return to the Promised Land from Egypt in the Exodus, followed by a deportation back to the East in the Exile. The Old Testament story concludes with a final journey of return to the Promised Land to await the coming of the Messiah.

The New Testament story also unfolds on a map, but this time as an ever widening circle centered on Jerusalem. The life and work of Jesus unfolds there, then moves further and further into the rest of the world as his disciples share the message “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (**Acts 1:8**)

In both the Old and New Testaments, God’s **goal** remains the same (to embrace ALL people throughout the world), and the same basic **strategy** is used (commissioning a

group of people to live out the message of God’s love.) In the Old Testament however, the approach is to have those people in a central location so that the message can go out from there. (**Micah 4:2b**) In the New Testament it’s the people themselves that are sent out into the world, bearing the message with them as they go. (**Matthew 28:19**)

The story of God’s activity in the world to deliver the message of love does not end with what’s written in the Bible. The story continues on through all the people that came afterwards, including each one of us. When we are called to be “witnesses,” it’s a call for us to tell our own stories of how God has touched and blessed us. Story is still the way that God is at work in the world.

Jesus used stories and parables when he taught 2000 years ago and he still uses stories to speak to us today, calling to mind a story from Scripture or life. Sharing these stories with each other is part of how we listen to God together, and how we care for and encourage each other. Stories become for us a kind of lexicon, a dictionary of images, ideas, themes and emotions that are able to catch our attention and strike chords in our minds, hearts and spirits. When we read stories in Scripture, we may begin by looking for what God *said* to people at the time since it may also apply to us today. But we also listen *through the stories* for what God is *saying* to us now. The story is still being told.

Genesis 12:1-3; Micah 4:1-2; Zechariah 8:20-23; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11; Acts 7; Hebrews 11:4-40