



The Life Cycle of a Disciple

*Clergy Talk #1 –
Fifth Day Retreat
for Walk to Emmaus
Communities*

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A few years ago I had a conversation with a fellow pastor whose church had rapidly grown after his appointment there. I asked him what he had done that played a part in that growth, and his answer surprised me. "There were two things," he said. "The first thing I stress to them is that *Shepherds don't make sheep; sheep make sheep.*"

It's a simple idea, but profound: Mature Christians make new Christians. In shepherding, this is the limiting factor. How many lamb producing sheep are in the flock?



When we look at the problem this way, it's obvious that few in our flock ever grow beyond the infancy stage of spirituality.



The actual percentage that remains at the infancy stage is close to 83% of church attenders. Lambs cannot make sheep; only sheep can make sheep. This is why many spiritual communities are rapidly dwindling.



This talk will discuss two
important spiritual questions:
How do lambs become sheep?
How do sheep make lambs?



A Discipleship System delineates the path for a disciple from the world, into the church and onward to maturity, and moves people rapidly toward spiritual maturity.

It is a process of grace.



Prevenient

Sanctifying

Justifying

Rapidly growing churches work diligently in cooperation with God in all three kinds of grace.

God's process of grace is not a straight line.
The Great Commission describes a *Cycle* or *Circle of Grace*.

Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them
(the mature disciples who had been with him for three years)
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mat 28:19 Go therefore
them and make disciples
of all nations,
baptizing them...

descending



Prevenient



Mat 28:20 teaching
to observe all that
I have commanded you...

ascending

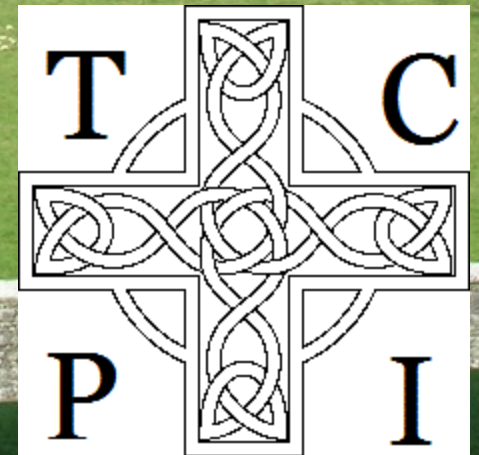


Sanctifying

Justifying

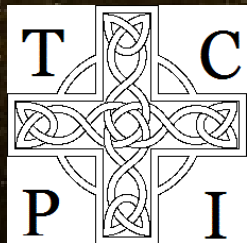


This talk suggests five stages of spiritual growth in a life cycle of grace.



How do lambs become sheep?

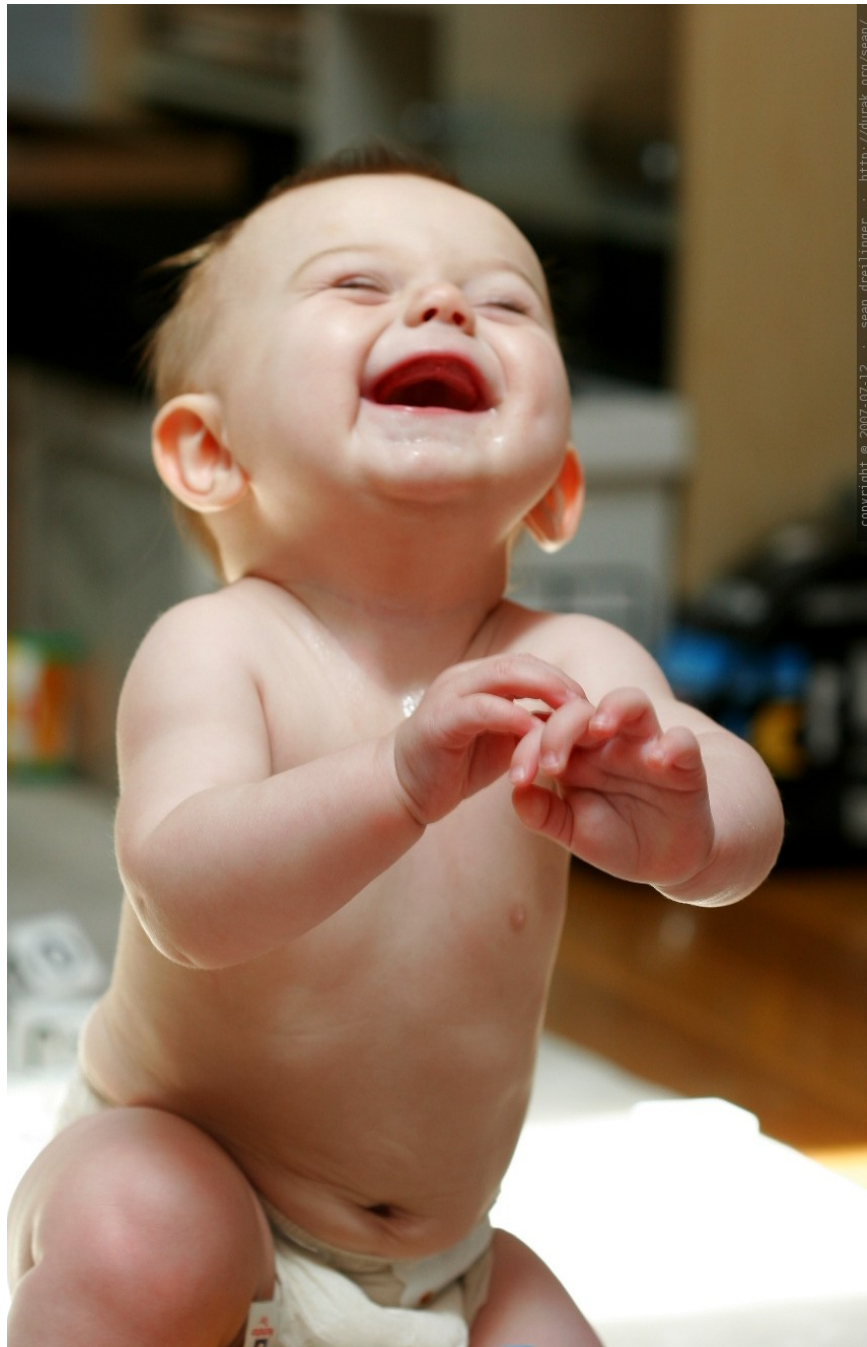
It is a process of Sanctifying Grace





The Infant stage of spiritual maturity is characterized by a need for love, nurture, fellowship, relationships, family, and by dependency.

Infants grow best in the presence of a parent who provides nurture and support.



Infants are
capable of
great joy.

But they are
dependent and
unable to care
for themselves.



Infants grow
through
relationships:

- with God
(Worship)
- with people
(Fellowship)



Many in the church never grow beyond this stage of needing love and nurture.

“Pastor, I'm just not being fed.”



Infants grow through relationships:

- involve them in acts of piety so that they will feel God's love
- involve them in fellowship groups to “love one another”

When they get stuck:

Love on them.



Are you so spiritually serious that you've forgotten how to play?

What fellowship groups are you involved in now?

What fellowship groups are available through your church?

What are your hobbies?

What do you like to do with people for fun?



When infants feel safe, they begin to explore their world. Curiosity grows within them.

What is
hard
at first



Will
someday
become
natural.

The Child
Stage is about
Learning.

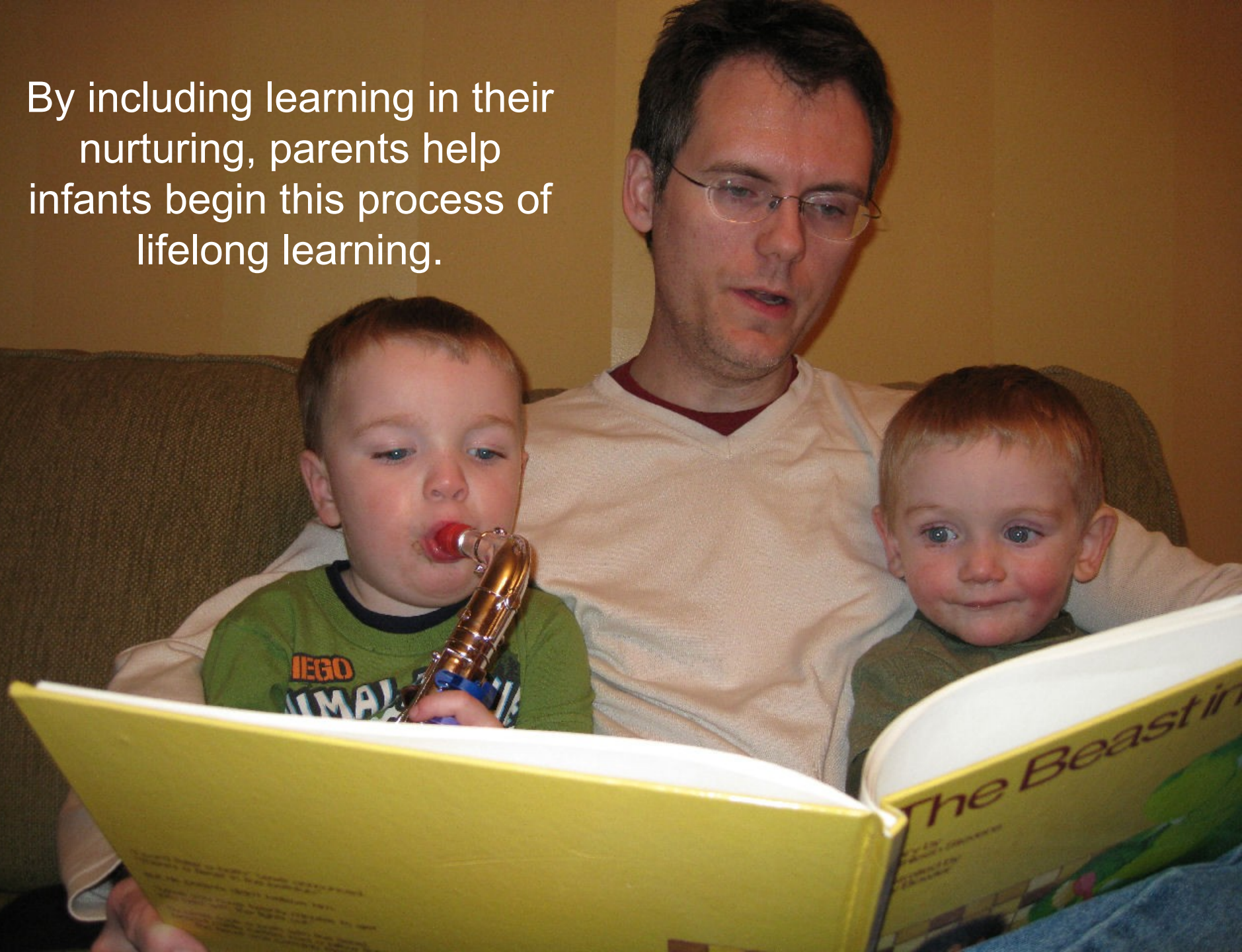
(It may take a few years
to learn how to walk ...
and a few more to run.)



Child stage characteristics include being playful, curious, asking questions, wanting to be "big" and to explore but stay in touch. Basic lessons in the child stage include learning manners, obedience, rules and good behavior.

As curiosity develops in infants, their desire to learn brings them into the child stage of exploring and learning.

By including learning in their nurturing, parents help infants begin this process of lifelong learning.





John 8:31-32: Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, *"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

The primary learning tool for child level disciples will be to read and learn scripture, and particularly the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

Regular involvement with scripture is the diagnostic identifier for a person who has moved from the Infant stage to become a disciple.

Worship attenders only, therefore, are by definition not disciples. Please know they are not bad people ... they are just not yet disciples.



Help children learn:

- involve them in reading God's word, seeking Christ's commands.
- involve them in learning groups.

When they get stuck:

***Ask + Answer
Questions***

A photograph of a grassy field with a wooden fence on the left. A black dog is running in the middle ground, and a flock of sheep is following it from behind. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

**As the Bible begins
to influence the behavior
of spiritual children,**

**their goals begin to change to
obediently following Jesus rather
than seeking their own benefit.**



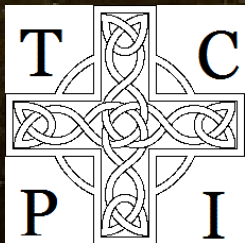
What book of the Bible are you currently reading?

What learning groups do you regularly attend?

What other spiritual learning groups are available to you?

How do sheep make lambs?

*It is a process of cooperating with
Prevenient Grace*





The indicator of readiness to move from Child to Teen level is often unpleasant and typically restlessness, dissatisfaction, and the feeling that something more is needed.

They have outgrown this level and are now looking for something more challenging; provide them with that challenge.

At first, this will be very awkward.



The teenage years are about developing competence and finding partners.



The teen stage is characterized by individuation, differentiation, rebellion, “doing my own thing with my own crowd,” and finding a purpose in life distinct from parental values.

Teens need challenging discipleship, peer community and subtle adult supervision. They need to develop maturity, consistency and emotional stability. Teens need to learn their gifts and strengths. Teens need to learn their purpose in life and spiritual calling; it’s like discovering a spiritual career. Teens need to go on safe adventures that challenge them and utilize their spiritual gifts.



The second thing is that each week as our worship service ends, I thank them for their ministry."

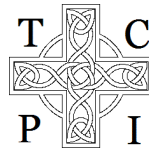
At the end of the teen phase, they know their ministry – their gifts and their mission.

This is like a spiritual career.

In descending grace

God's love and power
overflow toward others,
both within and beyond
the family of God.

John 7:38 He who believes in me, as the
scripture has said, 'Out of his heart
shall flow rivers of living water.'



John 4:14 ...the water that I shall give
him will become in him a spring of
water welling up to eternal life.

In ascending grace

God's love and power
flow in toward us
to fill us up ...



Missional servants

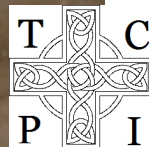


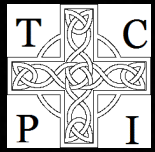
The outcome of spiritual adolescence is a person prepared for a spiritual career as an obedient servant of God in mission to the church and the world.

Do you know your spiritual gifts?

Do you know your mission in life as a servant of God?

Are you working at it?
Are you willing to serve God in a group?



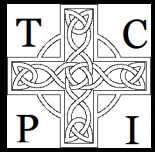


Small groups are an important means of sanctifying grace for disciples – when Jesus said “Follow Me” this first meant *learn with me in a small group.*

Eventually it means “carry your cross” and *serve with me in a small group.*



The basic New Testament pattern is to follow Jesus in a group rather than individually.

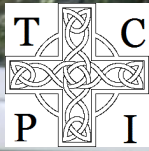


Would it benefit you to sit down with Jesus and other disciples once a week and answer a set of questions that would help you systematically evaluate your spiritual life?



Would you like to be in a Reunion Group?





Is this the high point of life?



Or does
life only
come full
circle when
we help
others grow?

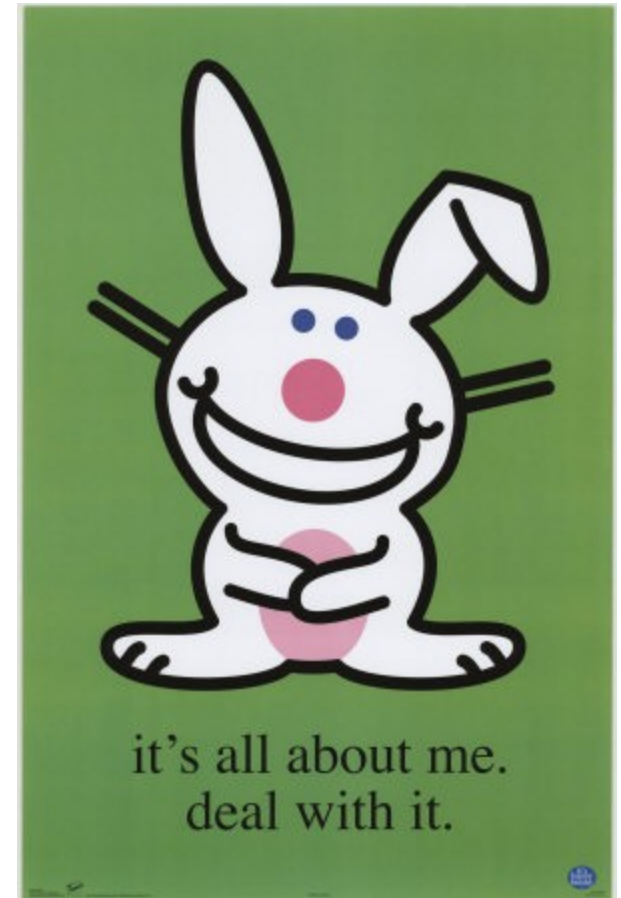


There is no slide for this level ... the **DINK** level, where you are primarily focused on a satisfying career & your own relationship,

where life is all about YOU.

Biological maturity means reproduction; spiritual maturity means making disciples. **Think!**

Don't be a DINK!

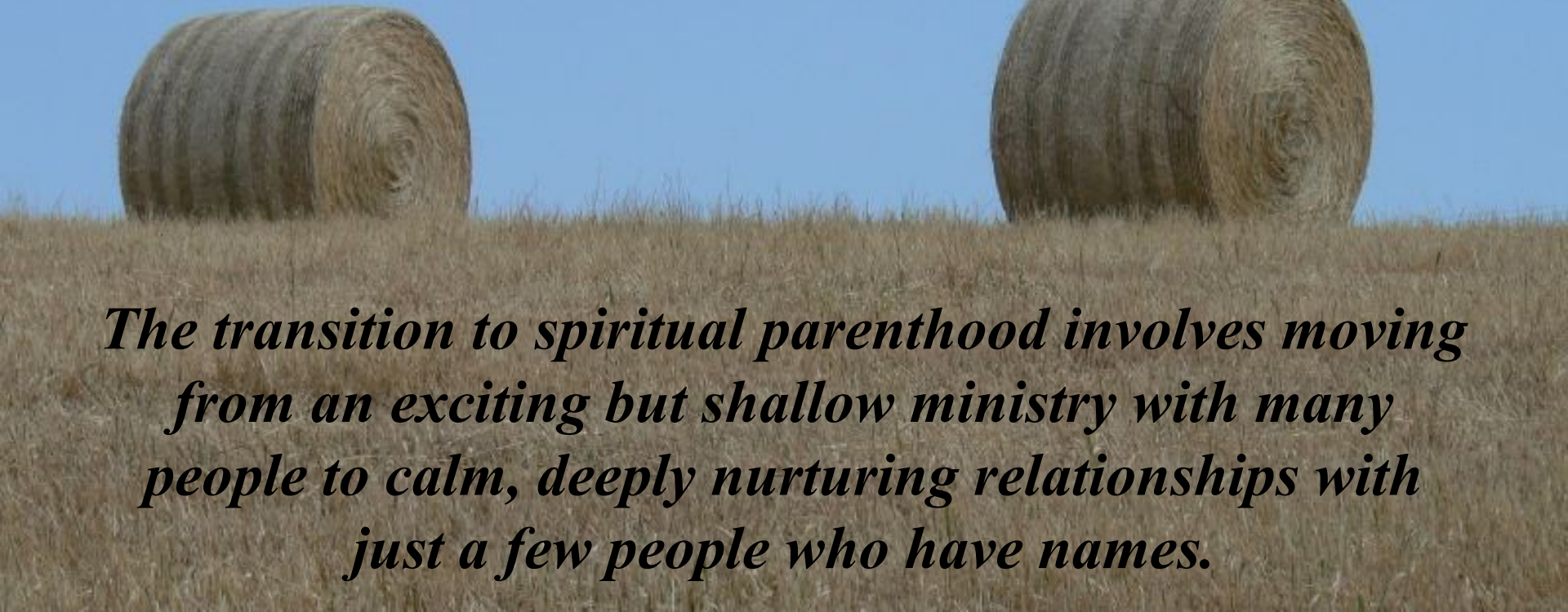


And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Luke 10:2



The Spiritual Generation Gap: in our culture, many are biologically adults while emotionally adolescent or younger. Few Christians grow up to become spiritual parents; they prefer an endless adventure without responsibility. Few churches teach spiritual parenting as a responsibility; this is the major obstacle to biblical disciple making.

The background of the slide features a photograph of two large, round hay bales resting on a field of golden-brown grass. The sky above is a clear, bright blue. The text is overlaid on this image.

The transition to spiritual parenthood involves moving from an exciting but shallow ministry with many people to calm, deeply nurturing relationships with just a few people who have names.

**These people who have names
are our disciples.**

**Every lay person is called to carry out
the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20).**

- From Paragraph 126, 2008 Book of Discipline.



Are you
willing
to labor
in the
harvest?





Who's
in
your
back seat?

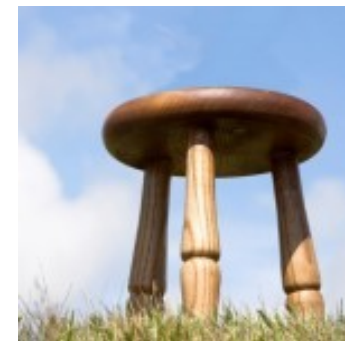




When your child becomes a parent, you become a grandparent – 2 Timothy 2:2
Spiritual grandparents help spiritual parents with the grandchildren.

The Big Picture

the *Walk to Emmaus* as a
Discipleship System

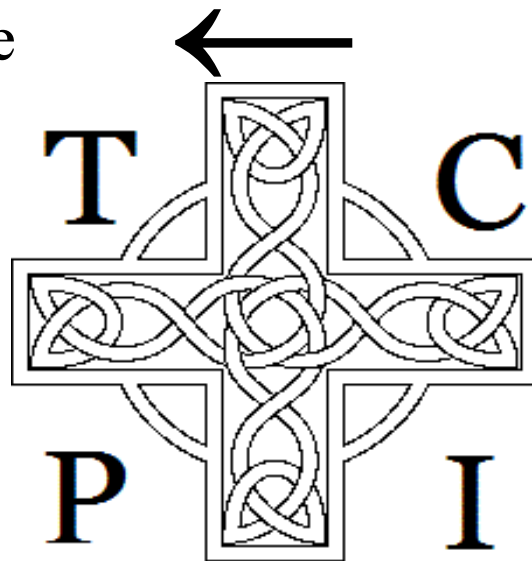


Reunion Group

Mat 28:19 Go therefore
and make disciples
of all nations,
baptizing them...

Rite of Passage

Mat 28:20 teaching
them
to observe all that
I have commanded
you...



Prevenient



Sanctifying



Prayer Tool

Justifying

Sponsorship