

How We Join God In His Work

Joining In

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:15; Colossians 3:5, 12-14

If God is working to move people into a deeper trust relationship with himself through various means (community, truth, prayer, suffering), the question becomes, “How do we, as relational disciplinarians, join God in this work as we invest into the lives of others?” In short, our desire is to be used by God to help others move from vigorously trying to manage their Christian lives to a place of surrendering their lives over to God.

This is where we must meet people where they are. Simply telling them that they are managing their lives and they must give up the reigns of their lives to God through surrender falls way short of God’s design for making disciples. Recall, people have very deeply-rooted definitions of life and death that are contrary to God’s definitions. In addition, people already have natural skepticism and cynicism toward Jesus, His Word, His Church, and Prayer. This is displayed through thoughts and statements like, “I’ve tried out Jesus and He hasn’t made my life work.”

Are there ways that we can be used by the Spirit to help others participate in the Divine Nature, to learn the Trinity Love Dance? Since we are designed to be relational at our core, it makes sense that relational discipleship is just that: discipleship that happens through relationships that have been forged between disciplinarian and disciple with the Holy Spirit being their deepest common bond. This spiritual journey includes a community with God and a community with other believers. It is here where spiritual friendships are forged and where spiritual direction is given and received.

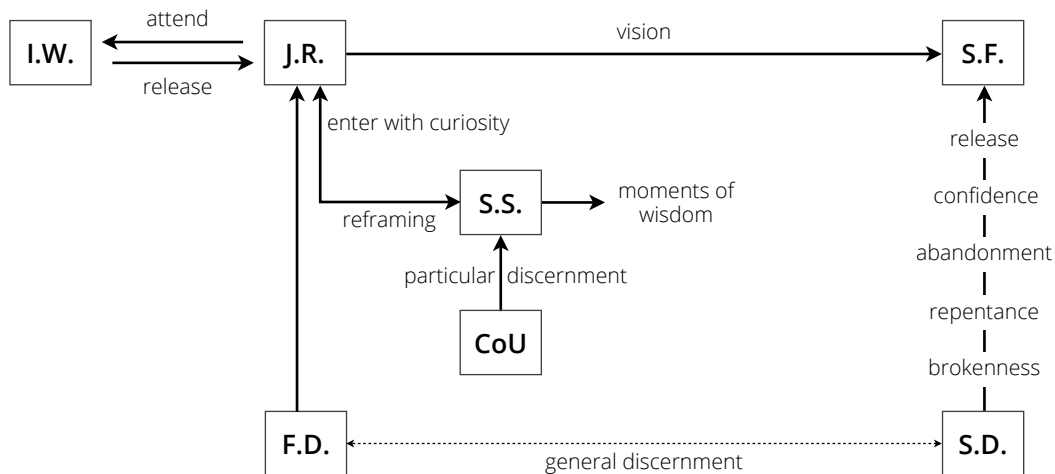
Spiritual friendship happens when we: enter another person’s life with a sincere interest in them as an image bearer of God; see their trials and blessings and remain engaged with them through both; and touch their new heart by believing in them as a beloved and growing child of God, and then expressing that belief in deeds of thoughtful kindness.

Spiritual direction (guiding others along the path the Spirit is taking their lives) happens when we: enter the battle going on deep within their interior world with discerning curiosity (we listen to their story); see with discerning wisdom the opposing forces of darkness (FLESH DYNAMICS) and light (SPIRIT DYNAMICS);

and touch with discerning grace the new life within them by standing against dark forces of behalf of God’s glory and by celebrating the power of light (by affirming it with the Spirit’s passion as we envision what they could be, remain steadfast in hope that the vision will be realized, and powerfully pour what is alive in us into them so that the Christ in them meets the Christ in you).¹

This all happens through intentional conversations, conversations that matter, conversations that the Spirit uses in the process of spiritual formation in others, conversations that bring the passion of Jesus and the wisdom of Jesus to bear in another person’s life as they are being led to the point of surrendering their lives to Him and what He is doing in them by a trusted spiritual friend. These types of conversations help to build convictions around Truth that is already known and opens the door for learning, understanding, and embracing more Truth.

The following diagram provides a vision for having conversations that matter. It displays more things to consider rather than strategy for conversation. A detailed description follows the diagram.



J.R. → (Journeying Reality). A conversation begins with someone’s Journeying Reality (JR). The JR defines the problem or thing they are struggling with at this moment in time.

Examples include:

- My son is smoking marijuana. He doesn’t know we know. What should I do?
- For a while, the urges seemed to lessen. But, in the last month, my addiction to porn has come back stronger than ever. I don’t know what’s wrong.
- I have this overwhelming sense of loneliness. God seems so distant. I’ve begged Him for a deeper sense of His presence. Nothing I’ve trusted Him for seems to work out. I’m afraid to hope. What is going on?

¹ Notes from the School of Spirit Direction, Dr. Larry Crabb. Pg 68.

These all bring a sense of wanting to help derived from our compassion for what the other person is experiencing. We must resist jumping in with our experience or “wisdom.” Something is happening deep within the soul of the other person that we must investigate and uncover if we are to help them desire to know Jesus (what they need) more than getting a quick fix to their problem (what they want).

We must resist their pull (the pressure we feel to comply with another’s demand) for a quick fix, yet be present with them in their situation. We do this by discerning their passionate question beneath their JR. If the passionate question is anything other than “Can you direct me as I seek to go relationally deep into the Trinity?”, then the passionate question is actually a demand (do something I require, give me something I want, satisfy something I crave). We must remain centered in the Spirit, not in the other person. We need to continually adjust our sails to His wind, not to the other’s “pull.”

If we lose our center in the Spirit, if our own ruling passion becomes fleshly energy to succeed in a relationship (to change another, to impress another, to win approval from another) rather than spiritual energy to join the journey to God for His delight, then we have fallen into the trap of man-pleasing, not God-pleasing. We will then be double-minded and unstable. We will not receive anything from the Lord that is of Him as we speak.

I.W. → (Interior World). In order to be present to another for God by resisting their pull and staying centered in God, we must attend closely and prayerfully to our own interior world (IW) so that His spiritual energy is released as we engage another. Within our own IW, we will feel the tension to want to share a similar experience or provide wisdom from our knowledge of Scripture. There may be a place for these, but this is not the time. What can happen is that the focus of the conversation now switches to “me” instead of remaining on the other person. If we are tuned into our own IW, we will feel the tension of wanting to steal the focus or to offer a great piece of wisdom for the sole purpose of wanting to look wise.

Attending to what is happening in us as we listen to another’s JR begins the spiritual cycle of brokenness → repentance → abandonment → confidence → release. Brokenness occurs as we recognize our own flesh at work in wanting the attention on us in the conversation. This brokenness leads us to our repentance of our relational sin. Through repentance, we make the faith choice to abandon the influence of the flesh by surrendering our soul to God in order to enjoy His love. We can then move with confidence into the JR of the other person for their benefit. This, then, empowers us to experience the ruling passion of Christ’s energy in us which we can then release as we enter, see, and touch another person with the wisdom we discern from the Holy Spirit.

S.F. → (Spiritual Formation). Spiritual formation (SF), forming more into the image of Jesus, in the other person is the goal in discipleship. The path to spiritual maturity is a marathon, not a sprint.

With that in mind, we don't expect a tremendous amount of growth from a single conversation, but what we do hope for is that God's Spirit will work to bring about some renewed thinking and a deeper desire in another to want to know Him more than they want to escape or fix their current situation. Spiritual formation is a process that takes place in the deepest center of the soul where the Spirit has given life to our personal capacities enabling us to desire (emotions), know (mind), choose (will), and experience God.

While in conversation, under the influence of the Spirit, we can begin to develop a vision for what the life of the other person might look like if they were to hand over the reigns of their life to Jesus in this area. What rest might they experience? How might they be able to love others well?

Effective disciplers operate under a God-inspired vision that resists the passionate demand coming from another in favor of the not-yet-fully-embraced passionate desire within another to want God, know Him, love Him, and enjoy Him. This passionate desire exists within their new heart created in the human soul at regeneration. Good spiritual direction works to release this in the other person.

F.D. → (Flesh Dynamics). The flesh is defined as energy centered in and coming from and flowing toward all that is not God. In discipling, we are working to help the other person discover the impact of their flesh dynamics (FD) in their lives. We are also working to help them take responsibility for how their flesh took opportunity of their past life-shaping experiences to define "life" and "death." Flesh dynamics work under the surface, at the root level, and are not always easy to perceive. They are naturally deceptive! It takes a bit of spiritual discernment to mine them. The core battle occurring in the soul of the other person is spiritual warfare against their flesh and what it has done and is doing with Satan's lies.

Because much of how a person is responding to their current situation (fear, disappointment, confusion, victim mentality, guilt, shame, finger-pointing, illegitimate pain reducing, etc.) has been influenced by their flesh from past experiences, an effective discipler will go into the background of another only so much as to develop an understanding of the FD's being manifested in the present.

S.D. → (Spirit Dynamics). Spirit dynamics (SD), energy centered in and coming from and flowing toward all that is God, are produced by the Spirit from within the new heart of the regenerated believer. Each believer has been given a new identity, a new passion, a new purity, and a new power to live as a child of God. These exist deep within every believer whether or not they are being manifested in the present situation. Although spirit dynamics are more powerful than flesh dynamics, a believer can functionally submit to their flesh and live out of their flesh.

When spirit dynamics are identified, nourished, and released in the other person, the result is spiritual fruit, the inevitable effect of their personal spiritual capacities (the image-bearing qualities of mind, will, emotions, desires) being energized by the Holy Spirit versus being energized by their flesh.

It's important to note that because our renewed capacity for God (our new heart) lies "deeper" in the center of our inmost being than our remaining capacity for not-God (flesh), we tend to access the flesh more easily than the Spirit (see diagram on page 10).

With all that said, a good relational disciplemaker must use spiritual discernment to distinguish between the operations of the flesh and the Spirit. Discernment sees and affirms what is spiritual; and it sees and exposes (and therefore discards as futile and foolish) what is fleshly.

S.S. → (Story of the Soul). The Story of the Soul (SS) is the deeper and larger story that serves as the context (and provides meaning) for another's JR. People are often unaware of their SS. A good discipler will employ the use of curiosity to investigate the SS in another. Curiosity thinks, "I wonder what's happening in the unseen IW of the other person and in the invisible Larger Story of God that He is telling right now?"

Through the proper use of curiosity, the effective discipler will be invited by another to explore their larger and deeper SS. The goal of this process is to help another shift from their present journeying reality (what they presently see and want) to the story of their relational soul (what they don't presently see, but need). For spiritual formation to occur in another, the inner being (the place where the story of the relation soul resides) must be accessed. Shifting from the present JR to the SS is called reframing. Reframing is driven by curiosity and guided by the Spirit as He works in the relational discipler to provide particular discernment and wisdom.

Particular discernment (compared to general discernment between flesh and spirit dynamics) begins with curiosity. Without profound curiosity, spiritual direction will be shallow. It will offer superficial healing (what they want), but not spiritual formation (what they need). It's important to note: as disciplers, our own flesh does not like the feeling of inadequacy. Therefore, we are prone to seeing and wanting to see only what we think we can handle. This reflects pride and fear (from a focus on self), not humility and trust (from a focus on the Spirit). Genuine curiosity requires faith!

Curiosity can be expressed in thoughtful looks, observations, specific questions, or open-ended formulations. At the core of being curious is a genuine desire in the discipler to see what is not yet visible in another. It's a burden to know what is not yet known, to draw close to another, not as an object or experiment, but as a fellow journeyer in whom the Spirit of God is at work. Spiritual curiosity is best understood as an exciting privilege.

Since we have been created by a relational God, we are inherently relational at the deepest levels of our existence. In addition, all of our nonclinical issues as people have their roots in relational experiences (positive or negative, perceived or real) and our flesh's responses to those experiences. As such, the SS is intensely relational. To gain specific discernment of the FD and SD at work in another, we must humbly investigate the Four Areas² of a person's relational SS. The four areas are described below.

1. Immediate Relationship (we want to discern what's happening between me, the discipler, and the other person in the present interaction)
 - What's happening right now as you are speaking to each other and existing in each other's presence?
 - What is passing between both of you? What is coming out of you into them, and out of them into you?
 - Observe style of relating and pull.
2. Present Relationships
 - What's happening in the primary relationships that are currently in this person's life?
 - How does this person view the role of others in their life? What is the dominant style of relating and pull with spouse, children, friends, colleagues, etc.?
 - Where are the joys and tensions? How are they experienced and handled?
3. Past Relationships
 - What happened in primary (influential) relationships in the past (parents, siblings, relatives, friends, children, etc.)?
 - What was poured into the person from their relational world that sent a message now believed by the flesh? For example, what belief about self was learned from events of parental neglect or peer humiliations?
 - It can be helpful to capture those events in imagery: "You now see yourself as an empty shell, as someone with no voice?" Or "You now see yourself as a mannequin, nicely dressed but only looked at, never known?"
4. Deepest Relationships
 - What image of God was learned and is now held? (Does the place they give God in their life reflect what they learned in the flesh or what the Spirit has taught/is teaching them through the New Covenant?)
 - For this person, what is prayer? (Hearing God speak? Fellowship with Him? Worship? Experiencing His presence? Confidence in His goodness?)

² Notes from the School of Spirit Direction, Dr. Larry Crabb. Pg 122-123.

As the effective relational disciplinemaker listens to the SS of another, he or she pursues each area and attends to how it is told and prayerfully discerns what is happening in the IW of another, seeking to understand what is heard in terms of the six Categories of Understanding (CoU).

In a bigger picture view of having a conversation that matters, we allow the Spirit to use us in the life of another to help them move from their present JR to the place of SF as we gain general discernment of their FD and SD through employing spiritual curiosity in response to their JR. This begins the process of reframing until their SS gives us adequate data for particular discernment of their FD and SD as we listen to the telling of their relational story through the CoU. When done well, the entire process yields moments of wisdom that, when delivered properly with humility, climaxes with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, what's alive deep in the other person has been excited to the point of wanting to know Jesus more than wanting a quick fix to or an escape from their problems as they move through the cycle of **brokenness → repentance → abandonment → confidence → release**. We are used by the Spirit to walk them through the process of putting to death FD (through brokenness and repentance) and putting on SD (through abandonment to God and confidence in God) in order to release SF, a change in perspective aided by the work of the Spirit through His Wisdom and Truth.

A Framework For Conversation

John 4:4-30; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; and Hebrews 4:12

The question now becomes, "How do we put all of this stuff into an actual conversation that matters?" It's important to note that not every conversation needs to go down this path. But, when a particular issue, problem, or challenge surfaces (whether in casual conversation, during a discipling time, or at a specific request to get together), it's an opportunity to employ what we've learned.

Conversational Flow

The conversation typically progresses as follows:

1. Someone has shared something in their life that has caught their attention. It's either a trouble ("My son is smoking marijuana") or an allure ("I keep coming back to porn"). They present it to you as their present JR, seeking your input in guiding their response.
2. You immediately attend to your own IW with the expectation of moving through the spiritual cycle of brokenness, repentance, abandonment, and confidence that leads to the release of Christ's energy out of your soul, guiding and carrying all you say. You now humbly depend on the Spirit, trusting that the ruling passion of your heart is His.

3. Next, you begin your search for Spirit-filled wisdom by submitting to the Spirit's authority and not giving in to the pull of the other. You seek Him to provide for you with a vision of what could happen and what will happen if He were to move freely in this person's life. You envision their SF (movement toward spiritual maturity) that will provide them with joy and wisdom, joy in God as their first-thing pursuit and wisdom provided by the Spirit's anointing in response to their JR.
4. You pray for general discernment to better grasp 1) a theology of their FD lying beneath all that is unnecessary and unspiritual in their JR and 2) a theology of SD that makes possible movement toward SF.
5. With a good sense of general discernment, you now want to gain a particular discernment of FD and SD. That happens when you:
 - Enter their JR with supernatural curiosity that reframes (see section below) the trouble or allure so that the disciple tells the story of his or her soul. You do this with intrigue and hope;
 - Engage in spiritual listening (listening energized by the Spirit and guided by the revealed biblical CoU) so that you see the particular operation of the flesh and Spirit in their immediate life while they share their SS;
 - Touch the other person's soul aiding them in putting to death the FD and bringing to life the SD that release their new heart (TRUE SELF) that exists for their joy and God's glory resulting in SF.

A Note On Reframing

Our passion as effective disciplemakers is to 1) enter the SS of another through their immediate, primary, past, and deepest relationships and 2) listen to the telling of that story with CoU that provide particular discernment of the FD and SD. When done well, reframing turns the disciple's attention away from their specific immediate trouble or allure (JR) toward the relationships in their life and how they impact and are impacted by those relationships.³ Reframing happens primarily by:

- Reinterpreting. "Sounds like your temper toward your son comes out of some pretty sensitive spots in you."
- Questioning. "When you found the marijuana in your son's room, what thoughts did you have about telling your wife or calling a friend or talking to God?"
- Observing. "So you were eager to tell your wife, but you didn't feel like praying."

³ Notes from the School of Spirit Direction, Dr. Larry Crabb. Pg 113.

- Waiting. You could respond, perhaps, with attentive silence. This is probably one of the harder things to do because we want to feel adequate in the conversation. It's good and appropriate to respond at times with "I don't know what to do right now." When we are silent, the Spirit has room to speak.

Reframing should begin within the first half hour and is part of the conversation after that. Note: Curiosity about the JR, if overdone, does not prepare the way for reframing. Rather, it fixes the other person's mind on the details of the JR and creates an expectation that specific advice is coming. (This is similar to a doctor asking a dozen questions about your chest pains, then saying, "Here's the medicine that you need.")

Reframing is simply a bridge to help the disciple cross over from their immediate JR to their SS that lies beneath the surface. Note: The disciple may attempt to cross back over the bridge many times to focus on their JR. That may require specific attention and perhaps a discussion of why they are directing their attention away from their SS.

Sometimes, a disciple's return to their JR reflects insufficient curiosity on the part of the discipler towards the JR. When reframing is successful, the disciple will be absorbed by the relational Story of his or her Soul (SS). Is it at this point, spiritual listening takes over and particular discernment occurs to better understand the FD and SD in this person's life.⁴

⁴ Notes from the School of Spirit Direction, Dr. Larry Crabb. Pg 113-114.

An Example From The Bible

Let's analyze the interaction between Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4:4-30.

Verse	Input from Jesus	Analysis
8	"Will you give me a drink?"	The woman came to draw water, aware of her physical need of thirst. This was her present JR. That is where Jesus met her. But his question provoked curiosity in her. We can tell this by her response (v9), "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" There was obviously more to his question than merely a focus on either of their JR's.
10	"If you knew...you would have asked..."	Jesus observed that the woman was unaware of the deep need that was in her (the thirst in her soul) and God's provision for the need (Jesus himself). Yet, his statement still provoked more curiosity from the woman as she says (v11-12), "Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father, Jacob?" She was wanting a quick fix to her JR (v15), "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."
10	"...and he would have given you living water."	Jesus developed a vision for what her life could be like if her soul were spiritually formed (SF).
16	"Go call your husband..."	Before he could give her the gift that she needed deep in her soul, he shifted the focus from her immediate JR (physical thirst) to her SS (relational thirst, beginning with the fact that she was living with a man, the primary relationship in her present life). Jesus was reframing her need from her JR to her SS.
18	"You have had five husbands"	Jesus then moves to her past relationships that show the history of her search for "soul water" without God. He sees and then humbly exposes her FD in her story.
21-24	"You worship what you do not know,...but true worshippers will worship the Father..."	Jesus discerned that the Spirit was working in this woman. He therefore sees SD by speaking of a reality the Spirit is preparing her to also see. Jesus was preparing her to see and embrace him.
26	"I who speak to you am he."	Jesus was leading the woman through a conversation that mattered in preparation to receive Him. At this revelation, she indeed received Him and began to live out of a new perspective (v39), "Many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony."

An Example From Culture

Let's return to the marijuana example and analyze the flow of the conversation up to the point where reframing begins. The abbreviations DE will be used for disciple and DR for discipler.

Speaker	Information	Analysis
DE	My son smokes marijuana. I don't know what to do.	The DE is presenting his present trouble, his JR that exists with his son.
DR	How did you find this out?	The DR is curious about the whole thing. He wants to know as much about this specific station as possible. This seems as good a place as any to begin.
DE	He left some of the paraphernalia in his room, right in plain sight. I went into his room to get something else and just saw it there. When he came home, I asked him about it. He said, "Yes, I am smoking dope. Big deal!"	The DR listens intently to "be with" the DE. The description of the interaction with his son gives some clues to this primary relationship in his life. As the DR listens, he is checking his own IW, moving through the spiritual cycle of brokenness, repentance, abandonment, confidence so what's alive in the DR can be released into the DE.
DR	What did you do?	The DR doesn't want to ask how the DE felt yet. He wants to get a sense of how the DE handled things, what his impact was on his son. The DE's choices will reveal his thoughts and feelings better than a direct question about either.
DE	I really stayed calm. I asked him how long he'd been smoking this stuff. He said a few months. Then I tried to probe a bit by asking what it did for him, if he was feeling bad about things, whatever. He just got sullen, told me I was weird, and said he wanted to watch TV. That's when I got angry.	Notice how the description of his choices revealed and even exposed his thoughts and feelings.
DR	Angry?	Through a simple expression of curiosity, the DR could lead the DE to telling more of what he did. This could provide a picture of the DE's style of relating or a gateway to his IW where he may struggle with blocked goals of competence, respect, power, etc.
DE	Yes, I kind of lost it. I told him he was grounded, that he could not live in my home and smoke pot, all the stuff I know is wrong. What do you think I should do now?	Notice the pull that the DE is attempting to get from the DR. At this point, the DR doesn't want to give in to the pull, but needs to explore the DE's other primary, present, past, and deep relationships. In this, the DR is developing a vision of what SF could look like if the DE sees God as bigger than the present problem.

Speaker	Information	Analysis
DR	Tell me how you and your wife have talked this over.	<p>This is the DR's first attempt at reframing. The DE's pull is for the DR to offer himself as an expert in parenting adolescence who can tell him what to do. The DR feels present with whatever God is doing and resists the DE's pull by exploring his other primary relationships. The DR wants to see if the DE feels and behaves strongly toward his wife. If the DE exposes core weaknesses, the DR can then move toward seeing patterns of relating, how the DE was shaped by earlier relational events in his life with his parents, etc., and then how he sees God being present in this whole mess.</p> <p>From this point forward more work on behalf of the DR would be necessary to complete the reframing process (helping the DE move from his present problem, JR, to the story of his soul). When the DE's soul is touched, he begins to see God and the pursuit of Him as the primary pursuit of life. It helps to put the current JR into the proper perspective.</p>

Conversational Anchors

The summary below is a good framework to consider using when dialoguing with others in a conversation that matters. These will aid in keeping the conversation on point and moving in a good direction.

- **Attend/Release.** The conversation begins with a defined JR. We want to attend to our own IW and move through the spiritual cycle of brokenness, repentance, abandonment, and confidence so that what's alive within us can engage with the other person. We need to resist the pull of the other person while working towards reframing.
- **Curiosity.** We need to "be with" the person we are having a conversation with, spiritually listening to what's being said. We want to be generally discerning their FD and SD as we engage. We are looking for bridges to move from the current JR to the Story of their relational Soul (SS). We do this through asking questions about their primary, present, past, and deepest relationships. Then, while listening through the Categories of Understanding (CoU), we seek particular discernment and wisdom from the Spirit as to what they need, resisting their pull to give them what they want. Through this process we also uncover their definitions of death and life that are helpful in understanding how their FD are playing a role in their SS.
- **Timing.** Timing is very important. Giving wisdom too soon may result in the person not being fully heard or fully understood. This "wisdom" may not necessarily meet the deepest needs of the soul of the person. Resist giving "advice." Resist sharing your own experience. Resist wanting to provide information that sounds full of wisdom because you feel inadequate. Continue probing and investigating and discerning what the Spirit is truly wanting to provide and do in the other person. Many times, silence is okay. Remain in prayer. Remaining

processing the CoU. “Wait for His wisdom. . . .”

- **Vision.** This is what SF would look like in the other person if they were to see the pursuit of Jesus as the primary affection of their life over and above their current JR. The process of the conversation matters tremendously. Think of how Jesus led the woman. He did not just blurt out, “You need me” at the onset of the conversation. He led her through a process of realizing her own deeper need and then posed himself as the solution to that deeper need. When the vision for SF is from the Spirit (not your flesh), it will help the other person surrender to the spiritual cycle of brokenness, repentance, abandonment, and confidence to release what’s alive in them for the glory of God. They will be touched. Their perspective will change. They will be transformed by the renewing of their mind. They will want a deeper relationship with Jesus more than a quick fix to their present problem.

Connection to Worldview Pillars

The role of Truth from Scripture is vital in spiritually fortifying another believer. Touching what is alive within them is important, but anchoring them in the Truth is vital if they are to become spiritually stable and effective in living for Jesus, confirmed in several areas of Scripture (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; and Hebrews 4:12).

Through the process of uncovering the Story of the Soul, you may discern some worldview pillars⁵ that align more with the natural worldview than the biblical worldview. When this is the case, we encourage you to validate this through subsequent conversations and through prayer. If confirmed, we encourage you to make a plan to feed the necessary truth into the mind of the person you are discipling to nourish, strengthen, and stabilize them in the truth. We have provided potential areas of the Bible to consider for each pillar within the curriculum document for the Discipleship workshop.

⁵ See the MC Leader Workshop called “Discipleship” for an explanation of the worldview pillars of authority, righteousness, opposition, mission, identity, faith, hope, and love. The Discipleship curriculum document can be found by navigating to the “Leaders - Workshops - Discipleship - Curriculum” page on the website or in the Church app.