

The Four E Disciple Making Plan Series

Guiding Convictions for the Four E Plan (Eph. 4:15)

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Guiding Convictions for the Four E Plan

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: My First Exposure to Discipleship

1. I grew up in the church, participating in lots of its activities, within a Christian family with both parents affirming Jesus, for twelve years, and no one attempted to disciple me. No one offered. Yes, plenty of people spiritually invested in me through programs like Awana, youth group, Bible camp, Sunday morning services, Sunday night services, etc. but discipleship was a foreign concept to me. Most of the influence others had on my Christian life was done from a distance indirectly. I believe my experience is typical for those in the church.
2. While there were plenty of spiritual conversations I participated in, these were with my circle of friends who knew just as much as I did or even less. These peer relationships and conversations weren't that helpful spiritually because none of us had a lot of spiritual knowledge or experience. We had good conversations and developed deeper relationships, but these relationships didn't move us forward in the Christian life.
3. It wasn't until my freshman year of college, after I decided to give my life to full time ministry, that one of my youth professors invited me to meet with him and two other guys to have spiritual conversations and receive some help in my pursuit of Jesus. This was outside of classes, church ministry, and other educational activities at the college. This was simply one person investing time and effort into a few others for our spiritual benefit. Our small group of guys was my first exposure to discipleship—thirteen years into my Christian life.
4. I don't want your church experience to be like mine. I want your church experience to be better! That is why the elders want our Four E disciple making plan to be our primary ministry of emphasis. We want to put people before programs.

B. Discipleship is tragically not very common in the modern western church. Although disciple making was Jesus' primary ministry strategy toward which He devoted most of His time and effort, the western church has decided on different priorities—to our own harm. Here at Community Alliance Church, we want to do better for Jesus which is why we've spent the last two years developing our Four E disciple making plan as a tool to move us toward disciple making. The emphasis is on the disciple making not the tool.

C. This discipleship shortcoming leads to neglect and misunderstandings about what it means to make disciples. It is common for those in the church to think discipleship is not necessary for the Christian life—certainly not as necessary as attending church. As we look around the church, most Christians do not want to be disciplined and do not feel any personal responsibility to make disciples, and this is the fault of leadership within the church. What the church needs, including ours, is a cultural shift that moves us back to Jesus' methods of ministry. This is a movement into the unknown and the uncomfortable. The elders of CAC

acknowledge this. We want to learn about and develop a disciple making culture as we move toward this priority together.

- D. Because we have a desire to be like Jesus and devote ourselves to what He practiced, we are willing to walk down the difficult road of changing our church culture toward disciple making. We do this intentionally and purposefully holding specific convictions about the way people are transformed by Jesus. There are seven main convictions that motivated and drove the structure of our Four E disciple making plan. To help generate excitement and desire for what we've built, we want to communicate these guiding convictions.

II. Spiritual Transformation is Required (Eph. 4:15)

- A. The first guiding conviction of our Four E disciple making plan is the fact that God expects and produces spiritual transformation in the lives of those who belong to Him. Individuals who are given the Holy Spirit through their trust in Jesus will be changed into a new person (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who are truly touched by the love and power of Jesus will be different as a result.
- B. When speaking generally about the church, Paul highlights the fact that every true disciple has the responsibility to be growing spiritually with God,
¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *that is*, Christ, (Eph. 4:15)
- C. Speaking truth to one another with the right attitude leads to spiritual transformation ("speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up", v. 15). It is the normal and natural path of the Christian life for disciples to grow spiritually. They grow through learning the truth. They grow in all areas of life ("in all aspects", v. 15). They grow to be like Jesus ("into Him who is the head, that is, Christ", v. 15). If a person isn't progressively becoming more like Jesus, they are not living the Christian life the way God intends. Growth and spiritual development are an obligation every disciple has. No one should feel safe with Jesus while remaining complacent. No one should feel safe with Jesus while lacking noticeable growth in convictions, character, and conduct. If a person is not moving forward as a disciple something is wrong.

III. Spiritual Transformation Needs the Bible (1 Pet. 2:1-3)

- A. Now that we know and are convinced disciples are spiritually alive and therefore will be growing with one another, we are positioned to understand the importance of the second guiding conviction for our disciple making plan. The leadership of CAC is persuaded that personal soul transformation requires regular and ongoing contact with the word of God—the Bible. In fact, contact with the Bible with a humble attitude of openness and trust in God is the single most transformative spiritual habit a person can have. This has been true in my Jesus journey and I'm convinced this is true from the priorities and emphasis of Scripture, as well as observing the experience of others.
- B. Here is how the beginning of the Christian life is described,
¹ Therefore, rid *yourselves* of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ² and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Pet. 2:1-3)

- C. Since disciples have a relationship with God (v. 17) through Jesus (v. 19) and have a purified soul as a result (v. 22) we should be responding to God in a particular way (“Therefore”, v. 1 and “if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord”, v. 3). God’s word, through the message of Jesus, makes people spiritually alive which allows and empowers them to overcome sin in their life (“rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy, and envy and all slander”, v. 1).
- D. Not only are active sin and wrongdoing supposed to decrease in the lives of those who are spiritually alive, we are also supposed to be growing spiritually as well (“so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation”, v. 2). Everyone who has experienced God and been made spiritually alive has the responsibility to be growing—moving forward in the Christian life being shaped by God to be like Jesus.
- E. Growing in salvation may seem not only odd but unbiblical to some. The problem arises because people have developed too narrow a view of what salvation means. Thinking salvation only refers to a person deciding to believe in Jesus as the person who can forgive their sins is only one element of salvation—called justification in theology. Biblically speaking, salvation is a broad term referring to God’s activity in humans by bringing them to God’s intended goal primarily in reference to being freed from the power and effects of sin.¹ Salvation also includes the elements of growth and sanctification—the process of being changed by the power of God to be like Jesus.²
- F. Even brand-new baby disciples are given a desire for God’s word for the purpose of growth (“like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow”, v. 2). If there is spiritual life there will also be a God-given soul desire to be nourished from the word of God. The result of having our soul nourished by God’s word is our growth in the life of God. If a person does not experience an internal draw pulling them toward the Bible, they should seriously question the validity of their connection to God. Those with spiritual life inside them will have spiritual desires from the Holy Spirit—one of them being the desire to nourish their soul from God’s word. If you’ve ever been around a hungry baby, you have a good picture of how a soul alive to God yearns for His word.
- G. Some people may be thinking, why should I keep reading the Bible when I get little to nothing out of it? I asked myself that question early on in my Jesus journey too. What I learned with more experience is that the problem was not with the word of God but with my lack of knowledge and experience in knowing how to interact with and study God’s word. At the time, I didn’t understand how much time and learning was needed for me to learn how to get nourishment from my time in the Bible. Spending time and effort with the Bible does produce the results God promises, just not as fast as we normally expect or want.

IV. Spiritual Transformation Entails Our Effort (Phil. 2:12-13)

- A. Another guiding conviction can be seen in our desire for contact with God’s word, disciples need to put intentional effort into the health and growth of their soul. Development in the

¹ Adapted from Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 105.

² Sanctification is to be called by God to continue to grow into and strive for holiness by cooperating with the indwelling Holy Spirit until they enjoy complete conformity to Christ. Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 105

Christian life will not happen on its own. Yes, God is at work in each disciple but that doesn't mean disciples are passive in the process of God working in them.

- B. Salvation is expressed as a process produced by our effort in partnership with God's work in our life,

¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12-13)

- C. God command disciples, through the words of the apostle Paul, to put energy and effort into their pursuit of Jesus ("work out your own salvation with fear and trembling", v. 12). Paul wants this to be a consistent and ongoing part of the church's spiritual life whether he's present with them or not ("just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence", v. 12). The good habits these disciples developed through the mentorship of Paul need to continue even after Paul left them. As important as putting effort into their relationship with Jesus was when Paul was with them, it is even more important now that he is gone.
- D. To work out their own salvation doesn't mean to earn a right standing with God through their good deeds or effort—justification only happens by trusting Jesus. Rather it refers to put the spiritual advantages and benefits of Jesus into effect entirely and thoroughly.³ Jesus gives us a lot of spiritual resources and tools, it is our task as disciples to learn how to use them for our benefit so we can "grow in grace" (2 Peter 3:18). We can only do this because God is at work in us ("for it is God who is at work in you", v. 13). Our effort is a response to what God has already done in us. God changes our heart so we learn to want to do what is pleasing to God and have the strength needed to do what is pleasing to God ("both to desire and to work for His good pleasure", v. 13). Spiritual transformation is a joint venture between us and God; we do our part while God does His. We work together toward the same objectives.
- E. Why put all the effort into personal growth when God promises to finish His work in our lives? If God is going to make us like Jesus in the end, why put up with all the work and hassle of trying to grow spiritually in this life? What this thinking fails to understand is the way in which God completes this work. God completes His work with us not without us. Like most outcomes related to God, God uses people to accomplish His purposes. We also miss out on many blessings God intends for us when we live spiritually lazy lives. Why wait until eternity when we can enjoy God's blessings now?

V. Spiritual Transformation is Progressive (1 Tim. 4:13-15)

- A. With the foundation we've laid so far regarding our convictions, we can see why the fourth conviction is significant. Our Four E disciple making plan is built around the idea that personal change and spiritual transformation is progressive—it develops step by step in an organized way. There is a pattern and structure to the Christian life. Following Jesus happens incrementally, putting one piece onto another.

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Philippians 2:12 "work out"

- B. Here is how spiritual progress is encouraged in the church,

¹³ Until I come, give your attention to the *public* reading, to exhortation, *and* teaching.

¹⁴ Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was granted to you through *words of prophecy* with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. ¹⁵ Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.

(1 Tim. 4:13-15)

- C. There are specific spiritual habits that can be participated in that promote the intended result of forward movement (“so that your progress will be evident to all”, v. 15). Soul development and spiritual maturity is publicly observable—it is not merely a private matter. While many spiritual habits are private (Mt. 6:4, 6, 18), the results of our private investments will be visible to all publicly. Other disciples with discernment can tell who is making progress in the Christian life and who is spiritually mature. Gradual improvement, growth, and development is how the Christian life advances.⁴
- D. The spiritual habits that contribute to this progress are reading the Bible, supporting and encouraging a response or action to the word of God, learning knowledge and skills from Scripture, and using our spiritual gifts to serve others (vv. 13-14). When we put hard work and effort into these habits, progress is made. Disciples make incremental improvements by repetition and strenuous effort.⁵ This is how spiritual progress is made with God’s help.

VI. Spiritual Transformation Transpires in Community (Phil. 1:25)

- A. The fifth guiding conviction informing the way our Four E disciple making plan has been formatted is that transformation transpires in community. While learning from the Bible is indispensable, we identify what it means for our lives and how to live with godly character through our community and our relationships.⁶ Living a solitary Christian life will be significantly stunted because community is a critical component to transformation. Isolated disciples are never as healthy as they could be. Much progress and good comes from participating in the life of Jesus with others. Contrary to our overly individualistic culture, Christianity operates differently than an individualistic approach. God intends life with Him to be shared in community with others. We need spiritual friendships to be spiritually healthy.
- B. Community promotes our spiritual progress,
- ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, (Phil. 1:25)
- C. Paul understands how God works in people’s lives. He’d been serving Jesus and the church for anywhere between fifteen to twenty-nine years when these words were written.⁷ Paul knows that God normally works through people, including himself. Paul describes his relationship with the people in the church at Philippi as a Jesus influence that helps them progress in their relationship with God (“I will remain and continue with you all for your progress”, v. 25). As

⁴ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Timothy 4:15 “progress”

⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Timothy 4:15 “Take pains with”

⁶ For more on this see Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks, [The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020).

⁷ Paul was converted in either 33 CE or 35 CE. Philippians was written between 50-62 CE.

Jesus lived in community with the disciples for their spiritual progress so Paul lives in community with various local churches when he was in their location planting churches.

- D. The biggest challenge in finding community with the church is the reality that people in the church still say and do hurtful things. Church hurt and being mistreated by those who claim to be following Jesus or are following Jesus can make us hesitant to be vulnerable and open when trying to create community within the church. Some people have tried so many times but were hurt in the process that they stop trying and put up walls instead. Rather than giving up on community disciples should learn to become more discerning and create community with those who are healthy and safe—at least at first. Once we grow into a mature disciple, we will be capable of responding to the hurts of others with a loving attitude for their benefit.

VII. Spiritual Transformation Flourishes when Focusing on Jesus (2 Cor. 3:14-18)

- A. Like community, another often neglected aspect of transformation is having the proper focus. Disciples need to regularly and consistently direct their thinking and attention toward that which helps them progress in their efforts to imitate Jesus. Disciples are transformed by regularly looking to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2). Disciples need to be constantly corrected and inspired by Jesus and His example. Jesus is who we want to become. He is the target for which we are aiming. Disciples should pursue Jesus with the determination and commitment of an Olympic athlete.
- B. Transformation happens in a specific environment,
 - ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. ¹⁵ But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts; ¹⁶ but whenever *someone* turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is freedom. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:14-18)
- C. The Bible alone isn't enough, it must be connected to a relationship with Jesus ("at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ", v. 14). A spiritual barrier prevents us from benefiting from the word of God and that barrier can only be removed by Jesus ("their minds were hardened...the same veil remains unlifted", v. 14). Once a person is connected to Jesus in a meaningful way, the Holy Spirit empowers disciples to benefit from God's Word ("the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom", v. 17).⁸
- D. Spiritual transformation happens when those who are spiritually alive with God look at Jesus and see Him for the incredible person He is ("But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed", v. 18). In Jesus, we see who we are as a spiritually adopted child of God—as if we are looking in a mirror at ourselves. In Jesus, our true identity is revealed, and we grow to be like Him as God changes us through His word and by His Spirit. Focused attention placed on Jesus is the means of being transformed. We grow up in

⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

Jesus by putting our mental focus on Him. Spiritual transformation increases when disciples focus our attention on Jesus.

- E. Another objection can be observed here because once again, I've thought and felt the same way early in my Christian life. Some people may think they already know everything there is to know about Jesus and they're tired of hearing about Him. They might grow tired because they've heard hundreds of messages about Jesus. As soon as they hear the name Jesus, they start to tune out. I thought this way and made these same statements before I really understood how awe-inspiring Jesus is. How can we get bored with the person we claim to love? Jesus is like a diamond that can be looked at from all sorts of different angles and there is always something new to see and appreciate.

VIII. Spiritual Transformation takes Time (Phil. 1:5-6)

- A. The seventh and final guiding conviction for our plan to make disciples here at Community Alliance Church is the knowledge that spiritual transformation takes time and there are no shortcuts. There is no silver bullet that will make us instantly like Jesus. There is no special strategy that will immediately give us Biblical wisdom. No action plan, no matter how good, can make us have godly character in three easy steps. God works in us throughout our lives in a never-ending growth process. No one can ever claim to have finally "arrived" in the Christian life and feel comfortable sitting back on autopilot. There is no retirement with Jesus.
- B. Here is how the work of God is described,
 - ⁵ in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 1:5-6)
- C. Notice how spiritual progress takes place over time—it is not instantaneous ("from the first day until now", v. 5). Our journey with Jesus begins the first day we accept Him as the Son of God who communicates God's message to the world and continues up to the present day—and it will continue tomorrow if we are still around. Time and consistency are major contributing factors to growth and transformation. Soul development and life change take decades, not months. As Eugene Peterson wisely said in a book with the same title, the Christian life is a long obedience in the same direction. We can observe the element of time combined with intentional effort as essential ingredients to spiritual health ("your participation in the gospel", v. 5).
- D. Once again, we see how progressive the work of God is in our lives and it progresses over time ("He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus", v. 6). God began His work amid the people of God and He will keep doing His work until Jesus returns and the current age of history comes to an end. God's work takes time to complete. God's work begins in a moment, and it continues over time until He is finished—perhaps all the way until the end.
- E. Knowing that spiritual transformation takes time, helps us avoid discouragement or frustration when we don't feel like we're growing. Being changed into the person God wants us to be is a lifetime project. No one grows at a constant and fast a pace as they would like. Life in the real world is messy and there are many challenges that slow us down. However, we can live the

Christian life with a mature attitude when we keep moving forward with Jesus despite what our past looks like all with the assurance that God is working in us and He guarantees a positive outcome.

IX. Conclusion

A. These seven Biblical convictions are the reasons why our Four E disciple making plan is designed the way it is. Each of these convictions are considered and used as a building block for our plan to be fruitful in our disciple making efforts. These convictions are driving our disciple making plan for CAC.

B. Our disciple plan is put together with the confidence and hope communicated in this passage,
¹³ For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of *mere* men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.
 (1 Thess. 2:13)