

OHIO VALLEY DISTRICT

5 D's DEVOTIONAL



A five week study over the five main elements of the Ohio Valley District of The Christian and Missionary Alliance's mission & vision to reach the 15 million people in our district for Jesus.

WEEK ONE



This week we will focus on the word 'depend', as in we all desperately need to depend upon the Spirit's work in our lives.

In coming weeks, we will look at 4 other D words but if we don't get the depend part right then we are just doing ministry in our own feeble strength and supposed expertise. If Jesus needed to *abide* then so must we.

DEPEND DAY ONE

When you are overwhelmed... Retreat

By Jeff Miller, Ohio Valley District Superintendent

I decided to take a bit of a break. It's good to get away. So I've traveled to Morocco. It truly is a nice place. Waterfront accessibility. Needed amenities nearby. A gracious, servant-minded staff. The sun is setting beautifully across the water as I write. The sky is blue; the temperatures are warm. I just ate a chocolate crème filled cupcake after a nice dinner of creamy chicken and shrimp alfredo chased down with a nice bottle of crème soda (I notice a cream/crème theme). Ahh, it doesn't get much better than this.

Okay, a couple of confessions: Morocco is Cottage 19 at Beulah Beach Camp. It is a common campout for me when I get away for a personal prayer retreat. The sunset and the staff are exactly as I described. The dinner was microwaved; the cupcakes were Hostess; the red crème soda Barq's. So much for fasting and prayer. [BTW: Beulah Beach makes its cottages available free of charge during low usage times to CMA licensed workers who want to get away for a prayer and planning retreat.]

I should also acknowledge something else. It is a terrible time to go away for a prayer retreat. I have a massive backlog of emails to respond to. People deserve a response to the items that are important to them. The list of phone calls I think I should make is longer than I have time for in even a relatively quiet week (though to be honest I have a hard time remembering what a quiet week is really like). There are challenging situations to attend to. There are some churches in varying degrees of crisis and in need of some assistance and shepherding. There are churches depending upon my partnership as they search for a new lead pastor or staff pastor. There are people to train, oversee and encourage. There are programs to be planned and future vision to be strategized. There are events to be prepared for. There are over 15 million people in our district who need Jesus. It's bonkers to think about being out of the office at this time. And don't think that is a small matter in my mind. The responsible part of me (yes, I do have a responsible part of me in there somewhere) is yanking hard at my body to hop in the car and head back to the office and yanking hard at my mind to be distracted by all of these truly important things that need attention.

I should also acknowledge something else. It is the most important time to go away for a prayer retreat. We sometimes use that old adage rather flippantly – "Too busy not to pray." We say it half seriously knowing that it makes sense ideally but maybe not practically. It was Martin Luther who said, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." He should be famous or something; me not so much. My typical stance has been: I have so much to do that I shall spend the first rushed three minutes in prayer and tackle the guilt of prayerlessness later. I was humbled tonight as I read again Paul's admonition to devote myself to prayer. So I journeyed to Morocco, not because I have the time but because I have the need.

My apologies to those who rightly felt during these few days that they needed my attention, but I wasn't available. It seemed to me that Father was whispering that He needed my attention. I don't always choose wisely at such moments but on occasion I line up the priorities correctly and time with the Lord is at the top of the list where it belongs; where I desperately need it to be.

DEPEND DAY ONE

Question for meditation and discussion

How do you intentionally posture yourself to abide in Jesus (See John 15)?

Carve out some extended time with Jesus this week

- Take a Bible, a notepad, and ears to listen.
- Settle your restless heart and write down the things you think the Spirit is saying to you.
- Choose a trusted friend to share some of what the Spirit has been whispering to you.

Read Psalm 46...Take time to 'be still and know'

- That you are not the god of your universe
- That He is the God of the whole universe, include your corner of it

Plan times in the future to get away with Jesus. Get it on your calendar and guard the dates. If you don't plan it then it won't happen. Without ruthless planning the tyranny of the urgent will win every time.

DEPEND DAY TWO

Dependency: We need to do it, but we don't want to

By Mark Reyes, Connexion in Bowling Green, KY

How often in life are we dependent on someone else? Sometimes by choice, and more often by necessity, we find ourselves needing to rely on others. I think it's true in church life also. In life, we count on that family member to be there for us or that friend to follow through. In church life, we count on each other and various leaders and volunteers to help carry the vision forward. We have to be—whether we like it or not—dependent on others. Oddly enough, I write all this while recovering from foot surgery. I can't walk or drive anywhere and everything takes longer to do. As much as I try to find various loopholes to the dependency problem (fun fact: I like doing things myself), I'm wholly dependent on my wife right now. I may not love the idea of needing someone else to help me with basic tasks, but right now I don't have a choice.

Whatever area we're talking about, I imagine as we go through life or as we sit as leaders around the table (or as I sit here with my foot propped up) that there may be a little fear and anxiety that arises within us when we think about depending on someone else. What we really fear is that the people we depend on won't do things like we want them to or in the time-frame we specify. Even deeper than that though, we don't trust. And frankly, we have a hard time trusting God. It's no wonder why we have such a hard time depending on Him and that's not without consequence. When we end up solely relying on ourselves or church leadership without any acknowledgment of God, our pursuits—though they may be successful for a time—will quickly fade away and not provide the lasting fruit that a God-centered work can do.

I think of the apostles in Acts 5 when they are confronted by the leaders of the Sanhedrin. The Jews were upset that the apostles were teaching in Jesus' name; they were so upset that they wanted to kill them. But, one of the leaders loudly proclaimed: "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39). This truth was evident in the apostles' ministry. Because they were led by God's Spirit, with complete and utter dependency on God, they're work was more than fruitful. That's true for us, but unfortunately the adverse is also true. If we live out this life alone or try to lead Christ's church in our own strength it will fail. Ouch. Even Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Without dependency on God, we can't do a thing. Another ouch.

Of course, I'm preaching to the choir; we all know that. We preach that. We teach that. If we really believe that, though, why do we insist on continuing to do things on our own or without God in mind? Remember, we're not doing our own thing as an individual, siloed church with its own catchy mission statement. We exist—in fact, we only have a mission—because God and His mission have a church to carry it out. The only way we can know what that is, the only way we can have the resources to carry that out, and the only way we can get a glimpse at the heart of God for our part of the world is with complete and utter dependency on God. That might be difficult for some of us. That'll mean forcing our "proven" modes and methods of ministry to take a backseat to what God really wants for us. That'll mean trusting when life and ministry is uncertain. That'll mean leaning on God whole-heartedly because we know He sees the bigger picture and knows what's best for His church.

DEPEND DAY TWO

Question for meditation and discussion

Is it easy for you to depend on other people? Staff? Volunteers? Church Leadership? Why or why not?

In what ways have you depended more on “proven” modes and methods of ministry? How can you position yourself to depend more on God?

What do you think are some defining qualities of a life or ministry where dependency on God is of highest importance?

Reflect on your own life or ministry. What blessings or fruit have you seen as a result of leaning on God?

DEPEND DAY THREE

Depending on God Requires Humility of Us

By Rick Maddox, Galion Alliance in Galion, OH

“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.”
1 Peter 5:5b-7

The bathroom sink was clogged again, and the Liquid Plummer didn't seem to be doing the trick. So I went to the basement and found the plumber's snake I hadn't used in years. I carefully ran the snake down the drain, twisted it around a few times and then began to pull it back up again. Attached to the end of the snake was an ugly, smelly, partially decomposed lump of hair, soap scum, and unidentifiable black sludge. I turned on the water and, at last, the drain functioned the way it was supposed to. The water ran down the drain without hesitation.

As we endeavor together to reach the multitude of unsaved people in our district, it is crucial that we depend on God's grace to accomplish the task. God's grace, however, only flows from above through the drain pipe of humility. Human pride is like the disgusting gunk in my drain that keeps God's grace from flowing freely in our lives and ministries. This truth is taught in 1 Peter 5:5, which says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” In the next two verses, Peter goes on to share three characteristics of the humility that allows God's grace to flow freely. Without this kind of humility we will find accomplishing God's mission for us very difficult.

To begin with, we need to trust in God's ability instead of our own. 1 Peter 5:6 tells us to “humble [ourselves], therefore, under the mighty hand of God.” We need to recognize that we ourselves are not able to accomplish God's mission. The mission can only be accomplished by His mighty hand working in us, through us, and around us. As soon as we deceive ourselves into thinking that “we've got this,” we have clogged the pipeline of God's grace. This doesn't mean that we don't work hard in fulfilling the mission; but it does mean that we must “labor for this, striving with His strength.” (Col. 1:29)

Peter goes on in v. 6 to remind us that we need to trust in God's timing, as well. We need to “humble ourselves... so that He may exalt [us] at the proper time.” That word “exalt” refers to lifting someone to a higher place, but it can also refer figuratively to being victorious or successful. We need to trust that God will successfully use us to complete His mission in the Ohio Valley District at the proper time. It may take longer than we would like, and it may surprise us by happening much sooner than we expect. Our role is to humbly persevere in what God is calling us to do while we entrust the timing of each success to Him.

Finally, 1 Peter 5:7 tells us that we need to trust in God's care. We are to cast all our cares on Him, because he cares about us. God never promised us that joining Him in His mission would be easy. The mission of God often involves trials, sacrifices, worries, and fears. But our God is bigger and stronger than any care we may have, so we can cast every care on Him and trust that He will take care of each one.

DEPEND

DAY THREE

Our mission requires God's grace, and God's grace flows to those who are humble. Let's not clog the pipeline and hinder the flow of God's grace as we carry out the mission!

Question for meditation and discussion

In what ways is pride hindering the flow of God's grace in your own life and ministry?

What does it mean for you to carry out God's mission in His strength instead of your own?

In what areas of your life or ministry is God calling on you to trust His timing?

As you consider your role in God's mission, what needs, concerns, or problems do you need to cast on Him today?

DEPEND DAY FOUR

Fully Depend

By Tim Miller, OVD Emerging Leadership Coordinator

Have you ever noticed that sometimes when you are reading the Bible, the answer to your last question is found in the next verse? This is especially true of Ephesians 5:15-18 where Paul is right in the middle of discussing instructions for Christian living, or life in the Spirit. He begins in verse fifteen by challenging us to live a wise life. But how do we do that? He answers the question in verse sixteen by urging us to make the most of every opportunity. A wise life is one in which we make the most of every opportunity. But how do we do that? He answers that question in verse seventeen by asking us to understand the Lord's will. We can't make the most of every opportunity unless we understand the Lord's will related to those opportunities! But how do we understand the Lord's will? Paul sums it up in verse eighteen. We live out God's heart when we are (continually) filled with the Holy Spirit. A wise life that makes the most of every opportunity based on catching God's heart and knowing his will, is a life that is controlled by and totally dependent on the Holy Spirit!

As a District, we are privileged to join God in His mission of reconciling all of creation to Himself, and that includes the 15 or so million who live within our geographical boundaries. Many of those precious people have never been given a winsome opportunity to truly hear the gospel. Though we are not in this alone, doing even our fair share is an overwhelming task. We can't pull it off! If we are to make the most of this opportunity, we will have to fully depend on the Holy Spirit! Just as a person who is controlled by alcohol isn't the same person as when they are sober; we, in a positive way, will need to be people who are different because we are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Only then will the 15 million people see Jesus, not us. Only then will the fruit of the Spirit flow when we are bumped. Only then will we see what God is up to and join him there!

When we exchanged our lives for life-in-Christ, our spirit which was dead was made alive. But it's so easy to depend on ourselves. Paul addressed this with the Galatians and called it foolishness. But we quickly forget and look to our strength as somehow enough. And yet to pursue the Christian adventure to which we are called without depending on the Holy Spirit is like having a dead battery in our car or failing to ever pull the chord on our power mower. The best we can do in our own strength is polish our car and sit in it making "vroom, vroom" noises. But you aren't going anywhere. The best we can do in our own strength is run the mower over and over the grass, flattening it with our activity but never really cutting anything! All kinds of busy activities and good ministries and great strategies devised and developed in our own strength can never compare to the work of the Holy Spirit. From the very start of our mission, let's make sure we are fully depending on the Spirit of God to lead us, daily asking him to fill us and shine through us. Anything less and anything else will be merely going through the motions.

DEPEND DAY FOUR

Question for meditation and discussion

What are some of the specific things the Lord is laying on your heart to pursue related to His reconciling mission to your neck of the woods that you know can only be accomplished as you depend upon the Holy Spirit?

When was the last time you were overwhelmed and burdened by the needs around you and then you specifically invited the Holy Spirit to empty you of your selfish thoughts and attitudes and actions and fill you afresh with the Holy Spirit?

How will you commit, moving forward from this day, to live with increasing Spirit-sensitivity to what God wants you to be and do?

DEPEND DAY FIVE

Let the Wind Blow

By Jeff Miller, Ohio Valley District Superintendent

I am comfortably nestled into a very nice cottage at Beulah Beach. I have settled in for a two-day prayer retreat. Just me, God, a book and a Bible and a notepad. A coworker had said that I looked like I needed prayer. I wasn't sure quite how to take that. In reality she gave me a wonderful gift. She realized that it was easier for me to talk about getting away with God than it was for me to practice it. So, she asked for permission to block off some personal prayer retreats on my calendar and then to guard them on my behalf. It was just what I needed, and I am grateful.

Now darkness has fallen along the shores of Lake Erie. I am reading about the wonder and work of the Holy Spirit. My heart leaps within me as I ponder again what Jesus means when He makes a rather radical claim that it is really good for all of us that He departs this world because then He will send the Spirit and as a result "greater things than these will you do." (John 14:11-13). As we ponder our place in advancing the Kingdom and carrying His love and grace to a lost world that sounds like something too good to be true. And, as we survey the landscape of the church in America it seems all too often that it is indeed too good to be true.

As I close my book, ease back the recliner, slide deeper into the warm blanket and begin to pray a sound starts to press into my consciousness. What is the sound? It is the wind whipping through the trees and pushing the waves along the lakefront.

The wind sounds powerful. In fact, it is powerful. It defies my ability to control it. It resists efforts to harness it. It can change direction and speed in an instant and without notice. It can be the source of great good and, at times, can seem to cause much destruction. It can dry up the soggy turf and it can carry rain to the parched land. Is it any wonder that wind is used as a description of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit? Is it a surprise that on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) they heard what sounded like a mighty rushing wind as they were filled with the Spirit?

There is wind in my cottage as well. Just to the left of my head as I recline is a contraption that manages the temperature and speed of the air movement in the room. I can control it. It is never too fast or too extreme. Outside, I am at the mercy of the wind. Inside, the wind is at the mercy of me. I am in awe of the sound outside. It beckons in some way. Yet I relish the comfort and control inside.

And in the midst of the wind whistling in the trees outside I think I hear the still small voice of God. He graciously points out to me that my real-life journey with His Spirit is not unlike my experience in the cottage. He calls me to step into the full force of the wind of the Holy Spirit, but I all too quickly fear it. Deep down it is a fear connected to control. I prefer the safety of having my own fingers on the control panel. Outside the wind can make my eyes water, can double me over, can mess up my hair and tear at my shirt, can lift me and carry me to God-only-knows-where, it is literally the breath of life but can just as easily take my breath away.

DEPEND

DAY FIVE

My eyes return to the book on my lap. It is A. B. Simpson speaking, "The practiced sailor knows by the signs in the air and by the very breath he inhales that he draws near the shore. And spiritual intuition is feeling the nearness of the Parousia, and the signs and wonders that lead up to the coming of the Lord are beginning to appear. I like to think that the word Parousia does not absolutely describe a clear-cut event that is marked by the limits of chronology. It literally means 'presence.' The Parousia is the presence of the Lord.

I cannot help thinking that the Lord's Parousia will approach us gradually and that nearer and nearer His longing heart, His magnetic touch will come to this old world to which He is looking so lovingly and longingly.

As He gets nearer, the very air will seem to be alive with the thrill of a supernatural presence." (Nuggets of Genuine Gold, Paul King, page 30)

And so, I feel the Lord tugging at my comfortable, controlled heart to toss aside my windbreaker, to throw caution to the wind and to step into the jet stream of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in my life. When it comes to life in the Spirit it can be good to be blown away.

Question for meditation and discussion

Spend some time praying and meditating in relation to the word 'control'.

- Who is more in control in your life: you or the Spirit?
- What are the barriers to the Spirit having full control of your life?
- In what ways is Abba asking you to relinquish control of something today?

Read John 14:11-14 and Luke 11:1-13

- What is the 'depend' application to
 - Your own life?
 - Your ministry?

WEEK TWO



It is not just a wish; it is a command. It is not just a commission; it is the Great Commission. And it needs to become the everyday rhythm in the pathway of our ministries and our lives. Let's dream of the step to where discipleship is not merely a hope and a wish but is our intentional strategy and developed culture. Disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

DISCIPLE DAY ONE

It Takes One to Make One

By Phill Taylor, Journey Church in Richmond, KY

Discipleship is a perennial hot topic of the Industrial Christian Complex. There seems to be a never-ending rushing, raging river of books on the subject. Not to mention conference breakout sessions, mini-courses, magazine and blog articles, tweets, and Facebook posts. We are continually being told how to be a better disciple-If we add this practice or read this daily devotional, our spiritual lives will take off. And how to make better disciples- you know, seven steps to making a lasting disciple or how-to disciple generation Z.

Don't get me wrong -- many of these books, articles, and social media posts have been helpful to myself and others. (Well, maybe not the social media posts.) The problem is, if we aren't careful, we can get lost in the constant flow of information and lose the true meaning of discipleship. Discipleship is simply following Jesus and helping others to follow him.

So, if you want to help people grow as disciples of Jesus, be the disciple you want to make.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1st Corinthians 11:1) This verse comes from a passage on the believer's freedom in Christ, but I believe the application is much more comprehensive. Paul's way of helping the Corinthian church grow is to tell them to live like him. That means Paul was confident that he was living in a Christ-like manner. When you and I seek to order and structure our lives to experience a consistent inward transformation that shapes the outward actions, we can invite people to follow our example.

Discipleship is a long process where we walk with someone through life, helping them see what God is doing in the highs and lows. We can only do this well when we have been disciplined well by the Holy Spirit and other mentors. That doesn't mean you have to follow Jesus for so many years before you can disciple someone, but it does mean that if we want to fulfill the Great Commission, we need to keep being disciplined.

Let me sum this up in one sentence. If you want to make healthy, growing disciples, you need to be a healthy growing disciple yourself.

DISCIPLE DAY ONE

Question for meditation and discussion

Spend time prayerfully reading 1st Corinthians 4:15-17

Do I have a mentor who is regularly "discipling" me?

Am I experiencing consistent inward transformation?

Can I confidently tell people to follow my example?

DISCIPLE DAY TWO

Discipleship Outside of our Box

By Mark Reyes, Connexion in Bowling Green, KY

Like many of you, I went to college and graduate school to be a pastor. Besides learning how to study the Bible, original languages, and Church history (among many other things), I learned how to do ministry. Once I did all that, I knew I was ready to conquer the world. Man, oh man was I naïve. I remember thinking during my first year in ministry about how much I didn't know. I didn't know anything about taxes as a pastor. I didn't know how to work a sound board. I didn't know what to do when the church basement flooded, which is actually an easy one to fix—just call the deacons (side note: I've found that's not such an easy answer in my current ministry because as a solo pastor in small church I'm also the deacon!). And even with all my years of learning to be a pastor, I found myself asking: how do I help a person grow into a whole-hearted follower of Jesus? Sadly, I wasn't quite sure how to do that.

How do we answer that? Maybe our first instinct is to figure out a new program to disciple a person. Maybe another instinct might be to hire someone to lead discipleship efforts. Of course, there's value in both of those answers, but what if there was, dare I say, a better way. Those might be traditional ways of dealing with discipleship in the church, but maybe we need to begin to think outside of our conventional modes and methods. Maybe we need to begin to think outside of our box of what discipleship is and how we should go about doing it. Thankfully, we don't have to come up with a new method; we need only to look at Jesus who modeled discipleship as a way of walking day in and day out with His disciples.

Jesus simply did life with His disciples, bringing them along to places he was already going. Sure, He taught them, but that was all within the context of life. And where Jesus went, his disciples went with him (whether just a few at the Transfiguration, or many as he travelled and taught). In every case, the disciples had a first-hand experience of what the life of Christ was really like and how to live it out. I think of John 13 where Jesus took the posture of a servant and washed His disciples' feet and in so doing tells His disciples: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). It is a great thing to teach people to be a servant of all, but what better way is there to disciple someone than to rub shoulders with them and show them—even if imperfectly—how to live the Christ life out.

Now, with all the things going on in our churches, we might object. We might say that we don't have time to disciple like this. We might say that we're busy. We might say that we just can't add another thing or another program to our plates. Don't get me wrong, we've all got many things on our plate and many hats to put on. But, let me ask: how can we re-think moving discipleship outside of the church walls and not just think of discipleship as something done on a Sunday? We don't have to add another thing into our schedule. Why not bring those you wish to disciple along with you: for a walk or run, for a home project, or for running errands. That might mean stepping out of our comfort zones just a little bit.

The fact is that discipleship was never meant to be relegated to only Sunday mornings or a position in the church. It should be woven into the very fabric of the life of God's people. Yes, we should teach people what it is, but what better way is there to teach them than to show them and to show them by simply doing life together.

DISCIPLE DAY TWO

Question for meditation and discussion

How do you define discipleship? Is there anything about your understanding that you need to re-think?

Reflect on John 13:1-7. What are some other truths/teachings that Jesus not only spoke about, but actually lived out?

In what ways can you begin to move discipleship outside of the church walls and not just think of discipleship as something done on a Sunday? If you're already doing this, how has this been fruitful?

Which areas of life are you able to bring someone along for to develop a deeper, more intimate discipling relationship?

DISCIPLE DAY THREE

Simply Disciple

By Katy McKee, OVD Staff & New City Church in Lexington, KY

Like many other young people who grew up in the Evangelical movement, I have had many different experiences with this thing we call discipleship. It has gone by many different names for me; Discipling, Mentoring, Apprenticeship, Coaching, etc. I don't pretend to be smart enough to know and discuss what the definitions of all these are, or how they are alike and different. But whatever you call it, it was presented to me as a way to be more like Jesus, and it has done great good but also great damage to my life and soul. Luckily, the good outweighed the damage and my relationship with Jesus remains intact. Sadly, this isn't always the case.

Hopefully, none of you have experienced the frustrating and confusing journey I have. I don't mean to be a bummer. I am actually very passionate about discipleship and believe it is the answer to growing healthy leaders and churches. But I am part of the problem. By no means do I have any of this figured out but stick with me here. You are part of the problem too.

Yes, the problem with discipleship is us, all of us. Ironic, I know. But in true human fashion, we find ways to take a beautiful thing God has designed and distort it to fit into a mold we like. I am just grateful the story doesn't end there.

In my experience, there are 3 major ways we have done discipleship wrong. First, we just don't do it. We choose to abandon our brothers and sisters who struggle to figure things out alone, and more often than not they end up walking away from Christ. We blame this on time, resources, lack of personnel, or any other excuse in the book.

Second, we try so hard to make the disciples we think need to be made. When we do this, we tend to only encourage the gifts in them that our church needs. We put their calling on the backburner and encourage them to sacrifice and give. We ignore the rest of the person they are or are becoming. This causes people to burn out, and feel inadequate, unimportant, and hurt. This too can lead to them walking away from Christ, or the church.

Lastly, we forget what, or rather who, we are making disciples of. The world does not need another Katy, we've got one (and that is enough.) What we do need is more people who walk, talk, and look like Jesus. We need to make sure we are making disciples of Jesus, not disciples of [insert your name here.] We need to teach people to make their help and their home in Jesus and run to Him. Jesus is the ultimate disciple-maker. We are no good at it if we aren't pointing to Him.

Obviously, none of these looks anything like what Jesus did. So how did he do it?

DISCIPLE DAY THREE

It is much simpler than we try to make it. First, He sought them out. He didn't force them, he just showed them what life could be like with Him and asked them to follow Him. Secondly, He loved who they were, not who they would become. Jesus didn't expect to gain anything for Himself by asking His disciples to follow Him. He didn't ask them to run the sound board or teach the children. He loved them and asked them to follow, and they watched (in the beginning at least.) Lastly, He didn't do it alone. Jesus was never alone, and neither are you. He got away to be with the Father, and so should you. He had Help (the Holy Spirit), and so do you.

Are you seeing a pattern here? What would it look like if we started to disciple the way Jesus did? Let's not wait any longer, let's do it the way Jesus did and simply disciple.

Question for meditation and discussion

Spend some time praying and meditating on your experience with discipleship.

- What good thing did you gain from it?
- Was there anything hurtful or damaging you experienced?
- How can you do better for those you disciple?

Read Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthew 9:9-13

- Who is God asking you to seek out?

Read John 13

- How can you support someone in their journey with Jesus in a way that doesn't really benefit you?
- Is there anything you need to repent from?

Read Matthew 28:19

- What are you trying to do alone?

DISCIPLE DAY FOUR

Go and Make Disciples...but don't be in a hurry about it

By Adam Eades, Journey Church in Richmond, KY

We all know the Great Commission when Jesus said "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:18-19

That's the first half, appropriately emphasized (in my opinion) in the C&MA.

Today I want to look at two things. The second half of the GC and a potentially overlooked detail in the closing of Matthew's Gospel account.

First, the detail. Did you ever notice that Jesus was buried just outside of Jerusalem, raised to life just outside of Jerusalem, encountered the women at the tomb, you guessed it...just outside of Jerusalem, but instructed His disciples to meet him several days journey away in Galilee.

If your answer is "no" then I'm in good company because until this year I hadn't either. Now I'm sure there's great scholarship as to why that was the case, but the answer I stumbled across made a lot of sense.

Keep in mind that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. And like any rabbi of His time, object lessons were considered as high value. You probably see where this is going. It appears to me that Jesus intentionally walked His closest followers several days and miles past many milestones, locations of emphasis from their time together, and probably people they had met (and maybe healed) along the way. He was brilliant, wasn't he?

And that leads us back to the latter half of the GC, where Jesus concluded with... "Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

That's quite a task, teach them to obey all that he commanded...that's close to three years' worth of teachings. Which leads me to my final point.

When we think of discipling others, how often do we think about it as years and years' worth of work? The Greek word for disciple is 'mathetes', which can also mean apprentice. How long does it take for an apprentice to grow into a master craftsman? A week? A year? A decade?

As we continue to live out the Great Commission, let's be prepared for the likelihood that the process of growing a disciple will take years of investment of our time, energy, possibly tears, and certainly prayers.

DISCIPLE DAY FOUR

Question for meditation and discussion

Take a few minutes during one of your quiet times to imagine how a few of those conversations might have gone on the trip from Jerusalem to Galilee....it's kind of a fun exercise.

It may be useful to reminisce on your own journey to see what God had birthed in you as the years have gone by. Did it happen quickly or over a longer, protracted time?

If it takes years to develop a healthy disciple, how might that change your prayer life?

Do you have a firm enough grasp on the teachings of Jesus to "teach someone all He has taught you"?

DISCIPLE DAY FIVE

Whole Body

By Tim Miller, OVD Emerging Leadership Coordinator

We throw leadership words like “mission” and “vision” around so frequently and so flippantly that sometimes they just become noise. But that doesn’t make mission and vision any less important. For example, the mission in sports is to win and the vision is to win championships. Hopefully other forms of winning are a part of the process, but to win is the mission. The mission in business is profit and the vision is sustainability. Hopefully a business wishes to accomplish a lot more than that for the good of the world, but without a sustainable profit a business will eventually close. But what is the mission and vision of the church?

To put it simply, the mission of the church is spiritual transformation and the vision of the church is Kingdom multiplication. When we come to Christ, we are new creatures who, rather than conforming to the world, are being transformed to be more and more like Jesus. Our goal is definitely not the de-formation that comes when we depend on ourselves rather than the Holy Spirit. And our goal is not to simply see formation, or even reformation, as good a start or re-start as they represent. Transformed lives reflect the greater mission to which we are called in seeing a world truly reconciled to God.

And our vision is to see that transformation multiplied. As disciples of Jesus, cleverly disguised in whatever vocation we live out, we want to make other disciples who experience transformation, who make other disciples who experience transformation, who make still other transformed disciples; until our world is saturated with the gospel of Christ! We do not want to be dominated by spiritual division that comes as we selfishly do our own thing. We do not want to be dominated by spiritual subtraction whereby we just keep going through the motions of doing the right thing.

We don’t even want to be dominated by spiritual addition, as much as we appreciate it, whereby a few gifted leaders and a few dynamic programs create pockets of people who come to Christ here and there. **We want to be consumed with multiplication that involves the whole body. And the only way to do that is to live out the essence of the Great Commission. The only way to do that is to make disciples, which includes developing leaders, saturating spaces, and planting church expressions!**

We are often tempted to abandon transforming multiplication because the process is slow and very intentional. It’s easier to conform than to be transformed, and to disciple another person fully may take years. It’s a little like the old object lesson of offering a child a penny on day one and then doubling it each day for 30 days or offering a child \$100 a day, every day, for thirty days. For many days, the penny-a-day choice seems so underwhelming. But after thirty days, that amount exceeds \$100 a day many times over! So when we disciple another, and he or she gets it, and in turn intentionally discipled another person who gets it, and so on and so on, at some point that growth becomes exponential and God’s mission of reconciliation is completed. Intentionally making disciples is not optional, it’s foundational! Let us not grow weary in making disciples!

DISCIPLE DAY FIVE

Question for meditation and discussion

If you were to honestly evaluate your local church setting, is deformation, formation, reformation, or transformation the dominant reality? If you were to honestly evaluate your local church setting, is division, subtraction, addition, or multiplication the dominant reality? If the answer is not what you want it to be, are you willing to be the starting point for change?

What are the characteristics of a healthy disciple that your church is seeking to reproduce in each person so as to reflect personal transformation? What are the characteristics and core values to which your church has committed that reflect your desire for corporate transformation?

What is your present practice or strategy for discipleship/spiritual transformation in the lives of the children, youth, and adults in your church expression who are responsive and ready to grow?

WEEK THREE



Develop

For many, many churches the 'strategy' for godly leadership development is simply a hope that the next visitors who walk through the church doors are quality Christian people who we can immediately enlist to fill the gaping holes of ministry needs in the church. But what if Abba intended for us to train up and apprentice godly servant-leaders who would be able to step into areas of ministry that fit their gifting and were in direct answer to the Voice of the Holy Spirit?

DEVELOP DAY ONE

Gap Fillers

By Jeff Miller, Ohio Valley District Superintendent

My brother and I were roaming the South Carolina countryside in search of adventure and fun together. Among other things, we would stop and check out historic markers when we came across them. I know, some of you are thinking, 'Adventure, reading historical markers, Jeff needs a life'. To each his own.

In the small town of Camden, we read about a Revolutionary War clash called the Battle of Hobkirk Hill. It seems the British/Loyalist forces wanted to take the knoll. The American/Patriot troops held the hilltop. Not only did they hold the strategic advantage of the high ground but they also had the benefit of numbers. The "Continental" on the hilltop divided into three groups: one on the right side, one on the left, and some of the best troops under the command of Captain William Beatty in the center to hold the hill.

The British troops attacked the hill but were clearly losing in the attempt as the battle went along. Their progress was halted and they seemed destined to have wasted their efforts and needlessly have lost good personnel.

Then a rather amazing thing happened to the detriment of the Continental forces. I have never shot a muzzle loader but I do understand that they are not highly accurate from long distances. There is a place for skill but some degree of luck may well play a role in any long range shot. In the midst of the skirmish a sharpshooter managed to hit and kill Captain Beatty. Almost immediately his troops on the center of the battle line fell into disarray and began to fall back. The English force pushed their advantage and split the patriot troops in the middle. Soon the battle was over and the Brits stood on the top of Hobkirk Hill. It was theirs, at least for a brief time.

I pondered that a bit. Clearly there is much I do not know about the specifics of the Continental troops that were trying to hold the hill. I do realize that they weren't highly trained special forces. In many cases they were simply militia - farmers and laborers banded together with only minimal training. But there clearly was organization and hierarchy and strategy and preparation. They knew the objectives, they knew the plan, they knew who were the officers to follow.

So how is it that they fell apart when the leader went down? I fully suspect that the fault lies with the leader. It seems that Captain Beatty had not prepared his troops for what to do and how to respond if at some point he was out of the picture. This was warfare, to state the obvious. People in battle, including officers, do get shot. Strategies do not always unfold as planned. Others do need to pick up the banner, the battle, the call of leadership, when someone in charge is down for the count. How is it that Captain Beatty had not prepared his team for the potential of his absence? In the vacuum of leadership, the followers floundered and fled. It should not have happened. They were winning, they had the needed people, they had the advantage of the best turf.

DEVELOP DAY ONE

But I suspect that many church leaders have failed in the same way that Captain Beatty failed to prep and train his 1st Maryland Regiment for this eventuality. There is not a leader on the planet who is immortal (at least as it relates to time on this earth). We will all someday no longer be around to lead our team and ministry. It might happen years from now. It might happen on our terms at a time of our choosing. But it also might happen tomorrow. It might happen when you least expect it and without you having a chance to add even one more word of instruction.

Will you have prepared them well? Will they hold the ground and win the battle (do recall that we are in a spiritual battle with the forces of evil and darkness – you are as much a commander in battle as Beatty was; and the stakes are far higher)? Or will they flinch and falter?

A leader has not led well if he or she has not prepared the team to thrive in his or her absence. Have you done your part? Do you have someone to fill the gap if you can no longer stand in that spot? Does everyone know their role and responsibility if they should have to step up and proceed without you? The influence, for good or ill, of leadership carries on long after that leader is no longer in saddle holding sword and standard.

Question for meditation and discussion

Do you have an intentional process for developing the servants and leaders around you?

- If so, explain it out loud to someone and ask their input and feedback.
- If not, how might you go about deciding what to do as your next steps?

Every servant leader ought to be working himself/herself out of a job. Who are you investing in who could someday do what you do?

- Identify them by name and map out a plan to increase their effectiveness.
- Pray for the Spirit to reveal to you some people of His selection and anointing for you to train and mentor.
- What resources might be beneficial in this process?

A look in the Book.

- How did Moses model this with Joshua?
- How does Exodus 18 play into this developmental pathway?

DEVELOP DAY TWO

You've Got All That You Need

By Phill Taylor, Journey Church in Richmond, KY

My first real venture into ministry leadership came when I was asked to serve as Christian Education Director at my church. I don't know that I was good at the job, but I did learn a lot and was prepared well to step into vocational pastoral ministry a few years later.

The Governing Board I joined was filled with older, wiser men and women. I don't think anyone on that board knew how much they would shape and develop me as a leader. They taught me practical things like running a successful meeting, creating an effective agenda, and how to disagree constructively. But more importantly, they taught me what ministry leadership looks like.

They took a young twenty-something and developed him into the kind of person and leader that they would one-day trust enough to call as their Pastor. That's much more of a testimony to their leadership and the work of the Holy Spirit than it is me. And that brings me to the point of this devotion. When you are in a healthy church, you have everything you need to grow.

Paul talks about this in Ephesians 4 and specifically in verses 15-16. Just before in verses 7-14, Paul discusses the gift of leadership given to equip the church, and the result is found in 15-16 where he writes, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." To sum that up. When you are part of a healthy church, you have everything you need to grow into the person God has called you to be.

Those of us called to lead the church have the privilege and responsibility to create healthy church cultures and environments where people can grow, flourish, and step into their calling. To paraphrase Dave Ramsey: The bad news is we're responsible for creating the culture of our church. The good news is we're responsible for creating the culture of our churches. It's not up to fate, or chance, or even, to some extent, the congregation. It's up to us to listen and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

If we want our churches to be places that develop disciples and send out leaders, we must first build cultures that empower young leaders, new leaders, green leaders, and even old leaders to lead, fail, and learn to depend on the Holy Spirit and then launch them into the world to make a Kingdom impact.

Cultural development is the start of all development.

DEVELOP DAY TWO

Question for meditation and discussion

Spend time prayerfully reading Ephesians 4:7-16

Do the senior leaders of your church spend time mentoring younger leaders?

Is your church culture more focused on success and presentation than learning?

Are you part of a healthy church? What can you do to help it move to the next level?

DEVELOP DAY THREE

No Ball Hogs

By Zach Meerkreebs, First Alliance Church in Lexington, KY

I had the joy of playing soccer from the 1st grade through college. I have played with some pretty poor players and some amazingly gifted ones as well. There were many people that I played with that went to the best camps, had the best coaches, played with the best clubs, and had the most impressive stats. These players, whether they were a centerback or a striker, were reliable to pull off a big tackle or score a glorious game winning goal. We won state championships, I saw people receive big time college offers, and even have the joy of watching a buddy play in Europe and now for the US men's national team. All of this is pretty impressive but the best players I ever played with...the real game-changing, culture building, impact making players...were the one's that passed the ball to players like me. The special players could play at those highest levels and succeed but also play alongside guys like me and others and make them better. You see, though I like watching guys take an entire team on or dominate an entire game, if they were a ball-hog or a poor team player...it got old really quick.

When I came to Christ and began working in churches, I had the gift of being around some pastors that went to impressive seminaries, were mentored by some amazingly wise leaders, had the joy of reporting amazing stats like church growth, giving, baptisms, and memberships. These were the kind of guys that if you had an event, you wanted them with the guitar leading worship or with the mic in their hand doing the alter call. Sounds a lot like some of those soccer players I played with...

It was not until I met a buddy, Alan, that I saw some that gifted, that anointed, with such a large platform...pass the ball. Alan was ready to "pay the tax" of developing a leader like me even if I bumbled over my sermon, led a meeting poorly, or fumbled in such a way that put extra burden on him. But because of Alan...there are Christian leaders ready to take on our calls with courage, confidence, and a readiness to develop the next generation behind us.

So, as we develop others...is it when it's convenient or when its uncomfortable to take the risk? Are we developing people that already have the competencies there so it doesn't blow up so bad or do we take a called emerging leader, with character and capacity, and pass the ball...develop them. If we believe what Jesus says in Luke 10:2 when He shares that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few...are we radically investing and developing folks for harvest work? It is pretty neat to be exceptional but what about being the most selfless...emptying yourself on behalf of the development of an emerging leader...extending and expanding Kingdom reach.

Lets not be ball-hogs, lets pass the ball, lets DEVELOP.

DEVELOP

DAY THREE

Question for meditation and discussion

Who do you have around you that is ready to be developed?

What are your desired outcomes for their development journey with you?

How can you develop not only ministry competencies but holistically develop them as Christian leaders?

What stands in your way, deep down, for going all in and passing the ball to an emerging leader?

DEVELOP DAY FOUR

Develop God's Purpose

By Tim Miller, OVD Emerging Leadership Coordinator

What would it be like to spend your entire academic career in Kindergarten? For a while it might be fun. I am pretty sure you would dominate the playground games. I am pretty sure we would ace the alphabet test. But after a while, it would become boring; and constant boredom leads to any number of negative scenarios. We were never intended to spend years in kindergarten. And what is true academically is true spiritually. We were never intended to come to Christ and spend the rest of our lives in spiritual kindergarten, individually or corporately. We were made to develop. We were made for spiritual formation.

Though we may not always take it seriously, we know that good nutrition, plenty of rest, and regular exercise is a solid formula for healthy physical development. This analogy can be applied to our spiritual lives as well. Good spiritual nutrition, plenty of spiritual rest and restoration, and regular spiritual exercise contribute greatly to our spiritual development.

Good spiritual nutrition includes the study of God's written Word for the purpose of application to our daily lives, full-blown first response prayer, and authentic community. Rest includes grace saturated living, dealing with conflict, practicing confession, and engaging the spiritual battle in the power of the Holy Spirit. Exercise includes using our spiritual gifts, extending our kingdom reach through spiritual conversation, and finding our missional niche. We can settle for spiritual junk food, spiritual restlessness, and limited spiritual exercise; but it will hinder our development. We will become bored, cranky, and lethargic.

The establishment of core values and practices then are foundational to this idea of development, whether we are talking developing disciples and leaders, or saturating spaces and planting churches. The core values of our denomination include reaching lost people, prayer, God's Word, stewardship, fulfilling the Great Commission, Holy Spirit empowerment, and faith-filled risks.

Relatedly, the discipleship distinctives our District longs for every believer to engage include intimacy with Jesus, sharing one's grace story/spiritual conversations, displaying the fruit of the Spirit, using our spiritual gifts, stewarding our resources, and developing a circle of influence or accountability with those we long to reach. The target characteristics that our District longs to be reality for our churches as a whole include divine expectation and engagement, interdependent leadership, multiplication, directional clarity, balanced ministry, and kingdom collaboration.

If you were to take the elements of spiritual development, the core values of our Denomination, the discipleship distinctives of our District, and the target church characteristics of our District all included above; such would provide foundational material for any church wrestling with the development of their core values. Each of these areas overlap or interrelate at many points. Combined with the unique context and considerations of each of our local church settings, we have common ground/strategy for what it will take to not only depend and disciple, but to **develop God's purposes for our churches**. As we do these three things well, we find ourselves in position to then deploy to the glory of God. And joy of all joys, we get to do it together too!

DEVELOP DAY FOUR

We can spend our individual and corporate spiritual lives in kindergarten, but I pray our deepest longing will be to develop into all God has imagined us to be from the very foundations of the world. It's what we are made for!

Question for meditation and discussion

Does your church have established core values and practices?

If so, does a critical mass of your local body know what they are?

If so, are those values consistent with our Denomination' core values, our District's discipleship distinctives and target characteristics, and the elements of spiritual development/formation?

If not, what might be a plan for developing your core values?

DEVELOP DAY FIVE

Develop

By Jeff Miller, Ohio Valley District Superintendent

Pam and I went hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado) a while back. We hiked to places like Bear Lake, Nymph Lake, Dream Lake and Alberta Falls. Just two weeks prior to our visit a friend had hiked the same trails. He came back with beautiful picture of the reflections of majestic mountains and blue skies off of the clear calm waters of the lakes. However, a lot had changed in a short period of time. We hiked in 20-degree weather and nineteen inches of snow. It was admittedly quite beautiful. Yet it was also frozen over.

Along the trail in the woods among the snow-covered evergreens it was quiet and peaceful. But when we came over a rise and out of the trees to the banks of Dream Lake, we could barely stand up in the face of what felt like hurricane level arctic winds.

And, there was no reflection. In the midst of the freeze we couldn't see the lake clearly and certainly couldn't see any reflection of the majesty that towered above and around the lake.

As I shivered and snapped a couple of pictures at Dream Lake and then turned with Pam to head back down the trail I wondered about how reflective my life is (or isn't). We are told that we are to look in a mirror to make sure that we can see Jesus clearly in our lives and that people ought to be able to see the glory of Christ radiate and reflect from every aspect of who we are (II Corinthians 3:18)



Dream Lake is nice in and of itself but there are millions of ponds and lakes spread around the planet. What makes Dream Lake stand out is the majesty and beauty spread all around it that it reflects. But one deep freeze takes that reflective nature out of the equation.

When it comes to the D of Develop we can, and should put together formal and intentional pathways of godly leadership development. Yet we must never forget that the greatest impact and influence in the journey of leadership development is not a book or a class or a conference. It is the reflection and modeling of Christ in my life and yours.

DEVELOP DAY FIVE

A question to ponder:

What are the 'freezes' in your life that can frost over any ability to fully and clearly reflect the glory and heart of Jesus?

- Scurrying busyness
- Purposelessness and aimless meandering through life
- Sin that captures and hardens us
- Frosted relationships and prickly edges
- Self-centeredness and self-reliance

You can probably think of others. Let's not let the chilly things of life so harden and cover the surface of our lives that people cannot see Jesus reflected fully and crisply in all aspects of who we are and what we do. When people hike into our presence may they see the majesty of our King that surrounds every part of us.



Questions for meditation and reflection

Look in the mirror at your life:

- What are the aspects of who God has made you that you hope people around you will see and want to emulate?
- What are the aspects of your life that you would wish were hidden? That you'd rather people not use as a pattern for their life?
- What are some of the things in your life that the Spirit would reveal to you may be hindrances that frost over the reflective surface of your life and hamper people's ability to see "Christ in you"?
 - What are sinful, selfish things that need to be addressed (repentance and transformation)?
 - What are some 'good' things (not sinful in and of themselves) but they hinder you from the 'best' things and lead to imbalance?

WEEK FOUR



This week we will explore the word 'deploy'. Over 20,000 people call OVD churches 'home'. This is the army of the Lord to deploy to carry the grace and love of Jesus to the 15 million who live within the our Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio borders. It is our responsibility to carry the transforming work of Jesus to them..

DEPLOY DAY ONE

Strategically Deployed

By Brian Scott, OVD Director of Multiplication

"I can't impress this on you too strongly. God is looking over your shoulder. Christ himself is the Judge, with the final say on everyone, living and dead. He is about to break into the open with his rule, so proclaim the Message with intensity; keep on your watch. Challenge, warn, and urge your people. Don't ever quit. Just keep it simple."
2 Timothy 4:1, 2 (MSG)

Deployment - the action of bringing resources into effective action.

This term has connotations of military action. We all have had friends and family that have been sent out to strategic positions to defend our liberty and to support our allies. For many families, military deployment has come with great cost. I have not lost anyone to a military conflict, so I can't speak to the sacrifice that is a part of seeing a son or daughter go to war. I do know that these families had to release them well before deployment in order to receive the training necessary for battle.

I enjoy exploring the history of WWII. Over and over again in the accounts of those who have served in wartime, they talk about their training taking over. As I have listened, I have wondered if I would have the calmness and focus needed to do my duty even when placed in high intense situations. These soldiers spoke of being unswervingly focused on the objective and desired outcomes even with the enemy surrounding them. A soldier deployed strategically has to be developed in order to handle whatever they encounter in hostile areas. Their training is geared to this outcome.

We have adopted this term to use in our district family's vision. We don't use this term in the OVD to be dramatic. There is definitely a strategic intention we have in placing disciples and leaders in geographical spaces. The investment and training needed for these disciples to be deployed is critical. We would think it ludicrous and dangerous to deploy a soldier who has never followed a command or even picked up a gun. We should have that same perspective when releasing our people into a world where they will be surrounded by the Enemy.

Most, if not all, of us have opportunities to continue to develop in our competencies in ministry. Should competency be our primary aim in developing and training disciples and leaders who will be deployed? The further development of our competencies is important. But when the heat is turned up and the opposition at its strongest, competency will not carry the day or capture the objective. The character and virtues developed through disciplines will be the training that is essential to overcome and achieve the objective.

DEPLOY DAY ONE

It is incumbent upon us as leaders to make sure we are preparing our people for deployment. Are we teaching them how to utilize spiritual disciplines? Are they soaking in the Word daily, meditating on Truth? Do they practice silence and listening prayer to know what Jesus's voice sounds like? Do they have a mentor or discipler speaking into their lives, not merely relying on a Sunday morning message for spiritual formation? And does everyone have someone they are discipling? If not, they will not be able to rely on their training when obstacles and conflict arises.

Question for meditation and discussion

You can't give away what you don't have.... Do you practice the rhythm of the disciplines of listening prayer, Scriptural meditation, silence, and solitude? Do you need to arrange your life to focus on one or more disciplines?

Are you investing in a discipling relationship? Is this person discipling someone else?

How can you facilitate a more focused discipling efforts in your community?

DEPLOY

DAY TWO

You are a Church Planter

By Phill Taylor, Journey Church in Richmond, KY

My church has had an effective ministry in our area for over thirty years. God has worked through our ministries and those who call Journey home, and it has been amazing. One thing that had yet to happen at Journey was a church plant. The idea had come up before, but for one reason or another, nothing came of it. That was until this year.

About three years ago, the longtime senior pastor left, and our leadership team was challenged to ask the big question, "What does God want to do through Journey in the next chapter?" After lots of prayers, discussions, and attempting to discern the will of God, we came to this conclusion: God is leading us to plant churches. Not one church but churches. It felt big and bold and way out of our comfort zone, but what are comfort zones for if not for God blowing them up regularly?

A funny thing happened as we began to pursue a church plant we all thought we knew how it would happen, and we were all wrong. It turns out, God wanted to plant a deaf church right in our midst. As of this devotional writing, the church plant is underway with a planting team, and hopefully, a launch just around the corner.

I write this to encourage you and remind you that your church is called to plant churches. That's what we do. It's in the DNA of the CMA. And here's a simple truth. Your next church plant starts with prayer. Dwight Smith, the founder of Saturation Church Planting International, talks about the three kinds of prayer needed for church planting:

- Visionary prayer. That is prayer that catches God's vision about when, where, and who and then expects God to answer and move in powerful ways.
- Targeted prayer. Once God begins to reveal his vision, our prayers become focused on a target. Maybe a neighborhood, town, or demographic.
- Expectant prayer. That is prayer that believes God will honor our obedience and bring people to Himself.

John writes these words about prayer, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us-whatever we ask-we know we have what we asked of Him." (1st John 5:14-15) These verses are used and misused frequently, but I think we can confidently say that God wants churches planted. He wants people to come to Him in saving faith. And when we begin to pray as leaders and churches that God would use our resources, energy, and people for this end, He will answer. It might not be the way we think, but it will be in His power.

And that's how a church plants a deaf church by prayerfully submitting our church to God's will.

DEPLOY DAY TWO

Question for meditation and discussion

Prayerfully read 1st John 5:14-15

Do we see our church as a church-planting church?

Where might God be leading us to plant?

How often do we pray about church planting?

DEPLOY DAY THREE

To Unfold

By Katy McKee, OVD Staff and New City Church in Lexington, KY

It is not in my nature to let go or change, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic reality. It was so much easier to NOT meet new people or try new things. Adjusting and changing just sounded exhausting and overwhelming.

So in all honesty and due to lack of inspiration, to write this devotional I decided to look at the Webster's Dictionary definition for deploy, and this is what I got; **to move into position, to utilize, to bring into effective action, to unfold.**

While I could easily use the first three definitions to communicate why we chose 'deploy' as one of the 5 D's, the one that resonated most with me was "to unfold." It made me think of my own life and what 'deploy' has looked like for me.

I think back to when I got my driver's license and could drive all by myself. That was exciting! Then, when I left for college. That was more scary than exciting (especially when my dad dropped all my underwear in the parking lot the first day moving into my dorm) but I survived. Actually, I thrived. That's where I truly found Jesus and heard the call to ministry. Then I met a guy and fell in love, we got married, and in case that wasn't enough of a change we thought 'why not move across the country to start grad school,' so we did! What a wild ride that was. Then we helped plant a church, New City, which led us to the CMA (thanks Zach Meerkreebs!) We bought a house, settled in Lexington, we were offered dream jobs and now we are longing for the day to become parents. I'd say those deployments were well worth it. Wouldn't you?

Documenting how 'deploy' helped my life unfold is eye opening. In my mind, deploy is something we all do, pretty naturally in fact. Life has a way of pushing us towards deployment whether we are ready or not. It causes us to change and make decisions. But I don't want to sugar coat it, I had hardships. I crashed my car. Failed classes. I saw people walk away from Jesus. I had my heart broken. I experienced death in sudden and difficult ways. And now, like the rest of you I've experienced a pandemic. I have found that even the hard things drive us towards 'deploy' too.

But what happens if we never attempt to unfold anything again? What happens if we don't change? Don't deploy? Well friends, I think we can all look back in church history for the answers to those questions. To give you a snapshot, attendance dwindles, choir robes become dusty and unworn, churches close, etc. We begin to gather dust and dirt. We fade, become matted, and are harder to unfold.

How do we stop this from happening? WE DEPLOY! If something isn't working, change it. If people aren't coming into the building, go to them! If none of that works, don't give up! Keep depending, keep discipling, keep developing, and DEPLOY over and over and over. It will be worth it, even if we don't get to experience the fruits of our own labor. It will unfold for His Kingdom!

DEPLOY DAY THREE

Another reason I love the 'to unfold' definition is it doesn't necessarily require us to take large action steps all the time. I think we have this idea that in order to be deployed we HAVE to take large, life changing actions steps. We actually don't! Or at least most of time they don't feel like big steps when in reality they are. For example, I never thought saying yes to helping with a church plant would later lead to me to working in the District Office. I was slowly being 'positioned' in order to be 'utilized.' Maybe you need to take smaller steps. Maybe offer more online content or have your quiet time at a local coffee shop every morning instead of hiding in your church office. Small changes can make a big different.

At the same time, maybe God is asking you to make a larger step. To be deployed to a new neighborhood, a new city, a new state, across the country, or around the world! Ask Him what "deploy" looks like for you and for your church in this season. Give it time, and see His glory unfold.

What do we have to lose?

"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Matthew 16:25

Question for meditation and discussion

Read Matthew 10:26-42

According to scripture, what do we have to lose?

Really take some time, ask God what 'deploy' looks like for you and for your church in this season.

What are small changes and/or big changes God has asked you to make? What is keeping you from making these changes?

DEPLOY DAY FOUR

Beyond the Walls

By Tim Miller, OVD Emerging Leadership Coordinator

Imagine gathering as a family around the Thanksgiving table (in a non-Covid year of course). The food is delicious and everyone eats their fill. But rather than getting up from the table when done; everyone just sits there until the next meal is served, and the meal after that, and the meal after that! Or imagine runners gathered at the starting line for a marathon. But when the gun goes off, rather than run, they just stand where they are doing jumping jacks! We would say that is pretty ridiculous; and yet sadly such often mirrors at least much of the practice of the local body of Christ.

Famed broadcaster, Pat Summerall, described a college football game as 22 players badly in need of a rest cheered on by thousands of fans, badly in need of exercise! A similar analogy often fits life in the church, as a few gifted people serve their hearts out while the rest of us cheer (or complain) them on.

In reality, everything we do should be designed for deployment. Everything we do should be designed to somehow release and better equip or encourage the body to be the light of Christ where they live, work, and play. As we gather for worship, it should intentionally include elements designed to send the body out to serve effectively. As we meet in smaller groups, the goal should include equipping us to serve in our communities. As we soak in fellowship, it should “feed” us to step away from the table to minister beyond the walls. When we plan outreach events, we should include as many or more that send us out as invite others to “come and see.” We are not called to a fortress mentality. We are the aroma of Christ to a hurting world.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 begins, “As you go”, not “as you sit”. And Judea, Samaria, and the World are every bit as much a part of the “go” agenda as Jerusalem! In Matthew 5, Jesus invites us to be salt and light. We are not to grow stale or keep our light shining only behind the four walls of the church campus. In Acts 1:8, we are commissioned to be “witnesses”, heralds or announcers of the good news of the gospel, not statues. As we depend on the Holy Spirit and make disciples and develop leaders, we do so to release or deploy them for ministry to others.

Late one night, a man stopped by a dry cleaners named “Twenty-Four Seven Cleaners” to drop off a suit he wanted to have ready for a business trip in the morning. But the cleaners was closed. A few days later he stopped in to explain his predicament a few days earlier and to ask why the store had been closed. The answer he received was this, “Oh, we are open from nine to five; ‘Twenty-Four Seven Cleaners’ is just our name!” When it comes to deployment, may we not be the church in name only. May ministry beyond the walls be alive and well!

DEPLOY DAY FOUR

Question for meditation and discussion

What ministry efforts of your local church are intentionally designed to be “salt and light” ministries to the community and beyond?

What percent of your ministry activity is focused “beyond the walls”? What would you prayerfully like it to be?

How do your worship gatherings, small groups, fellowship events, and outreach planning specifically contribute to the release, equipping, and encouragement of your body to serve where they live, work, and play?

DEPLOY DAY FIVE

An Old Fashioned Bridge

By Jeff Miller, Ohio Valley District Superintendent

I have thought a lot about the vision for evangelism that is found in churches. Some churches do nothing by way of corporate evangelism or community impact other than to preach a salvation message on occasion or to offer a video series on how to share one's faith. Some churches see outreach happen only randomly or haphazardly. By God's grace conversion experiences occasionally drop into the church's lap. Some churches do a lot of outreach events. This is commendable and certainly better than not doing any evangelism yet often it still relies upon an attractional model that doesn't fit our non-Christian culture very well. Few are missional and going out among the lost world to meet them where they are at.

I do not mean to imply that outreach events are bad. What I see sometimes, however, is that churches safely provide an event with a hope, a prayer and a poster to get strangers to show up. If a bunch of strangers show up, then it has been a successful outreach event. But I wonder...

A number of years ago Win Arn did a study of 4000 adult converts to find the reason that they had joined a church. Less than 10% came as strangers. Between 70-80% came because they were invited by a friend or relative.

So if Neighborhood Alliance Church has two identical outreach events and at the first event 10 families visit who are strangers to the church I think everyone would leap with glee and call it a resounding success. If at the second identical event only one new family attends: they are the Smiths who were brought by their neighbors, the Witneslovskis, who attend Neighborhood Alliance. Many would be disappointed with the turn out and point out that it had not been nearly as successful as the first.

However, if Arn is correct and we were to look at the probabilities from a different angle we would need to see 11 or 12 new families of strangers visit just to reasonably expect that one of these would stick. Maybe the first event wasn't quite so successful as it appeared because it was the church putting on an event for strangers. But the Smiths, statistically speaking, are much more likely to stay at Neighborhood Alliance because of their connection to someone in the church family.

This has started me thinking. We have many fancy outreach ideas but what if we simplified? What if a pastor asked his congregation to each make a commitment to invite and bring in 2021 one unchurched person or family that they know personally? This could be to a church service or a special event (now an outreach event is not an end in itself but a means to an end - it provides a platform for relational connection). What if each person who was willing to make this faith commitment wrote their name on a card along with the name of the person(s)/family(ies) that they think they are most likely to invite? What if the church prayed for both the inviter and the invitee at each prayer meeting, Sunday school class and small group study?

DEPLOY DAY FIVE

If a church has 100 adults and 50% (50) commit to this personal outreach and half of them (25) actually bring a guest and 70% of those 25 connected guests stayed that would be 18 new families/individuals. We'd be hard pressed to match that with any other kind of outreach. You'd have to have nearly 200 unconnected visitors come to statistically expect 18 to stay. I realize that we are speaking rather simplistically and that other factors can complicate this. For example, people in our churches will not likely invite others if there is conflict in the church or an unfriendly atmosphere or a dirty building.

Donald McGavran coined the term "bridges of God" years ago to describe this outreach. "McGavran discovered that faith spreads most naturally across social networks of [FRANs] friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors. He called these social networks over which the good news easily travels the 'bridges of God'." We all (including pastors) have or should have these bridges to the unchurched all around us. Outreach across these bridges is more effective than other styles of evangelism (though they have their place as well). There may be more glitzy and more modern bridges but nothing beats the old fashioned bridge of a relationship with a non-churched person for introducing someone to Jesus and His bride, the church.

Side bar: if this idea of 'bridges' is true (and intuitively we all know that it is) then maybe the best thing a church could do is have less events and programs, spend less money of glitzy outreaches, and provide more time (and even money) for church families to be 'deployed' to build friendships on their back porches with friends and neighbors over ice cream or hamburgers.

Question for meditation and discussion

How might our church help people unclutter their lives so that they have margin to be 'beautiful feet' (Romans 10:9-15) carrying Jesus to their circle of influence.

How might we share the glory stories of how our church people are carrying Jesus to a lost world.

Can you identify your church's "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth"? (Acts 1:8)

- Identify each
- Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to specific places, people groups and partnerships
- Pray for open doors to press forward in each

Identify your own "Circle of Influence": Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, Neighbors.

- Write down the names of 2-5 that you believe still need to come to know Jesus
- Invite others to join in praying for them by name this week
- Invite others to pray for you to see the 'doors of opportunity' that God provides (see Colossians 4:2-6)

WEEK FIVE



In the notion of the world, a hero blazes a trail of victory and accomplishment alone against overwhelming odds. Yet even in the Hollywood version rarely does the hero win the day all by himself/herself. And the Bible has almost no thought of the solitary, solo world changer. Moses had Joshua, Aaron and Hur; David had Jonathan and his 30 mighty men; Daniel had his fiery furnace cohort; Paul had a Barnabas, Silas and numerous companions; even Jesus had his 12. From the One Anothers to the plural 'you' all throughout Scripture, Kingdom advancement is meant to be a team activity.

DO IT TOGETHER DAY ONE

Do It Together

By Brian Scott, OVD Director of Multiplication

So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” -
Philippians 2:1-4 (ESV)

With the current COVID pandemic and racial unrest, we see all around us pleas for people to be unified. “Getting through this together” has been the mantra plastered on walls, billboards, and lawn signs. It is believed that if people will take this message seriously, we will not see the fear, anger, bigotry, and divisiveness. At best, we have seen some collaboration in philanthropic work as people give their best effort at “being together.” As a friend in our district family has stated, this will not be enduring especially when people move on to the next cause or when the vaccine is distributed.

Growing up, I had six friends who truly were as close as brothers to me. Each year over a span of six years, each friend married with the other five friends as best men in their wedding. For the bachelor party, we usually played paintball. It was quite a rush to strategize, with my brothers, ways to defeat the opposing team. The love I had for those guys added to the exhilaration of winning together. We knew each of our strengths and each of our weaknesses. We knew who to follow with each facet of our attack plan. On one occasion, we had to combine our team with strangers. Not only was it difficult to strategize with people we didn’t know, it lessened the joy of winning together.

As followers of Jesus, we know that our core beliefs drive our behavior, not well-intended slogans. If our beliefs are centered in Jesus’s desires for His Bride, we will be moving toward deeper connectedness. Without question, He wants unity. He prayed for it. He enlightened and catalyzed Paul to write about it in his letters. So, how will we achieve the depth of connectedness that is necessary to handle an objective as daunting as giving 15 million people gospel access? What is our district family’s responsibility in this objective?

Let’s start by reading how Jesus Christ practiced Kenotic leadership (Phil 2). There was nothing He wasn’t willing to give in order that people would have the opportunity to be unified with God. He first emptied Himself of reputation, privilege, and rights. He demonstrated extreme humility by being wrapped in human flesh. His obedience drove Him to the Cross. Paul said He is our model. For us, this kind of leadership expresses itself in considering others more significant than ourselves. It means that an ambitious pursuit of self-glorification or self-appeasement, especially when it comes to our ministries, is out of the question. If we operate in this vein in our relationships with one another, we will have the same love, the same mind, and we will be of one accord.

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY ONE

As some of you know, I am a huge Browns fan. There is one player in particular that I enjoy watching and that is Nick Chubb. He is a running back that demonstrates more humility than I have ever seen in a professional athlete. His teammates love him but say that they can't get him to show any emotion. After he scores a touchdown, he quietly hands the ball to the referee and walks to the bench. Ironically, the only time I have seen his countenance change is when a teammate scores; he celebrates. Can you imagine a group of leaders and churches who are more concerned about other ministries getting wins than for their own ministry? What kind of culture would that produce between churches who share geographical spaces?

There's something that happens in a culture when leaders take on the image of Jesus Christ in the demonstration of kenosis. The objective seems more attainable. Getting wins seem sweeter with those you are yoked with in obtaining those objectives. I believe it is happening with our district family. I fully anticipate it continuing because of the character of the leaders who populate our family, and also, this is at the heart of what Jesus wants for us.

Question for meditation and discussion

Meditate on Philippians 2. What posture does the Son of God take in relation to His Church? What characteristics of Jesus's kenosis can you practice?

What act of kindness or selflessness can you do on behalf of a sister church in your area?

Purpose to have a coffee or lunch with a leader in your area once a month for the next three months. Ask the following questions: What is your dream for impact in your community? What obstacles are you facing in your ministry? How can I support or serve you?

Kenosis (Greek: κένωσις, kénōsis, lit. [the act of emptying]) is the 'self-emptying' of Jesus' own will and some of His divine attributes (though retaining His full divinity) in becoming fully human and experiencing death while being entirely receptive to God's divine will.

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY TWO

100%

By Susan Scott, OVD & First Alliance Church in Lexington, KY

Knowing the value in assessments, I took the Meyers Briggs test-never guessing my results. 100% extrovert !!!???? As time has gone on, I would have to say that I am NOT 100% an extrovert, but I do know that I DO appreciate having people in my life! Moving around has created a challenge when I have come into a new community and attempted to “be a friend” to those who “need a friend.” What I appreciate about the Christian community is that we provide many opportunities to connect and get to know other people.

When Brian and I first moved to Kentucky, First Alliance Church under the leadership of Steve Elliott graciously hired me to direct the women’s ministry. What a gift to me as I could invite women to coffee, and they didn’t wonder why in the world this new woman was reaching out to them and wanting to get coffee. I came to Steve multiple times telling him thank you for that gift of a position at a church so that as an extrovert I could be with people in a place where we only knew a handful of people.

Out of this time here in Kentucky, I have learned of the amazing way God places us in community, and I believe there are many reasons why God wants us to do life together so I will share my thoughts on three of those reasons here. God wants us to do life together because we need people in our lives to hold us accountable. One gift to me has been a mentor/friend who meets with me, shares life with me, prays for me, asks me questions, helps me process different situations and circumstances in my life, and knows details about me while still caring for me. There are also friends for whom I am thankful who know how and when to ask how to come alongside me to hold me accountable for different disciplines that I want to practice, with Sabbath especially being one of them. I also have found women who have kids in similar stages of life, and we have shared that we will be praying for each other as our kids are making decisions. “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.” (Proverbs 11:14)

God wants us to do life together because He wants to refine us. There have been multiple times that even though I really want to be around people, I could really rather just do it myself. Why? Because it is challenging working with people who think differently than I do or ask that dreaded “Why?” question. Looking back on my now 50 years of life, I can see the people God placed in my life to help me think beyond my “I’ve always done it this way” mentality. I am so thankful for them. There have been people who have boldly, in love, walked with me through difficult times and pointed me to Jesus. There have also been circumstances in my life when I have worked with others who have challenged me to love them as God loves them even though we do not agree. I have to ask God for His work to be done in my life as I serve and walk through life with others. “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.” (Philippians 1:6)

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY ONE

God wants us to do life together because He knows that each person cannot be all things to all people-I have shadow areas and do not see everything at all times! I need people in my life who have insight into areas that I don't, sensitivity for subjects that I don't, and understanding that goes beyond my limited understanding. I have my own circles of influence and cannot reach into areas that some of my friends are involved with currently. I want people in my life who point me to God while exposing areas where I am lacking. "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Thank you, God, for the gift of needing other people and doing life together!!!

Question for meditation and discussion

Take some time to pause and think: Who are some people you are currently doing life with that you can be vulnerable with and ask them to hold you accountable?

Thank God for the people He has placed in your life who are different from yourself. Name each of them.

Meditate on Philippians 1:6- chewing on each word and asking for God to speak His Truth to you.

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY THREE

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

By Phill Taylor, Journey Church in Richmond, KY

Leaders are mythical. They are humans, but somehow, they are more than we are. They have plans, followers and bring imagination, ideas, and visions to life by the sheer force of their will. They captivate us so much that we spent an estimated 15 billion dollars in 2019 on leadership/executive coaching, trying to become leaders. Leaders are mythical.

Leadership is epic. It's this state in which we- the leader- get others to do things they never would have dreamed possible. It's earth-shattering and world changing when it happens. And to understand it and hopefully create it, we buy- and sometimes finish- leadership books, attend seminars about it, and get advanced degrees in it. (I'm working on one right now.) Leadership is epic.

But here's the thing. From the surface, leaders and leadership seem mythical and epic, but if we dive deep into the subject, we find that success was never the result of mythical leaders doing epic leadership. Instead, it was a team of people unified around a common set of values and a vision. Are leaders and leadership important? Yes. But they are only a fraction of what is needed to accomplish a mission and fulfill a dream. Teamwork is essential.

Take the Apostle Paul, for example. We talk an awful lot about Paul's ministry, personality, leadership style, and so on. But if I asked you to name the people in Paul's team, most of us would get a handful of names, but according to Jeremy Edgar (he counted), Paul's team was made of at least 76 people- those are just the ones he named in his letters. Think about that for a second. The greatest missionary, sorry International Worker, in church history had a team of at least 76 people. It wasn't Paul, alone with his message. It was a team of people, including Paul, working together to accomplish God's mission.

So when Paul makes a statement like this, "5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. 9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building." (1st Corinthians 3:5-9) It's coming from a man who truly knows what it means to be co-workers in God's service.

Paul understood that unless we do Gospel work together, we aren't doing Gospel work. Paul knew that God has called each one of us to a specific ministry task, and it will take each one of us working together as a team to see the mission completed and the Gospel preached to all nations. That's the goal, the mission, and the vision to see the Gospel preached far and wide, and men and women come to know Jesus as their savior, and the only way it's going to happen is when we each step up, team up and get to work.

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY THREE

So to sum it up. The only way we can complete God's mission in the world is if we do it together. Because teamwork makes the dream work.

Question for meditation and discussion

Prayerful read 1st Corinthians 3:5-9 and reflect on your God-given role.

Is my view of leaders and leadership shaped more by the world or the word?

How big is my team? What unites us? What motivates us?

Who can I partner with within my city or region?

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY FOUR

Two Heads are Better Than One

By Carolyn Manley, OVD Staff & First Alliance Church in Lexington, KY

As an African American woman who has inherited her African American ancestral hair texture, my mama either kept my hair in the typical ponytail or the two “pig tails”. Otherwise, if left undone not only would I have looked like a flyaway tangled mess, but I would’ve suffered the pain of mama’s physical workout trying to get a thin tooth comb through my thick hair while tugging and breaking the ends. My hair type tends to dry out easy and produces very little oil during the cold months. For this reason, during the months of January through February, mama would tightly (the kind of tight that make my eyes look like I’ve had a facelift) take 3 sections of my hair, braid it and wash our hair each week while the hair was still braided. During the first of March, mom would take the braids out and my hair would not only be free of tangles, but our hair had grown and had a gloss from the strands that were woven tightly together and was much stronger due to the time the oil in the scalp nourished the braids without the daily friction of combing and tugging against each strand.

This reminds me of the scripture from Ecclesiastes 4:12 “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

We can easily go alone on this journey of discipleship, but how much strength do we really have on our own? How tired will we have to get before we give up and quit? I don’t know your thoughts nor you mine, but I do know we are different. I don’t have your gifts and you don’t have mine. Even if we have the same gifts, we all utilize the gifts the Lord has given us in different, yet unique ways thus complimenting each other. Like my hair when each strand was blowing in the wind my scalp became dry and my hair became brittle and easily breakable until it was braided together to let the strands rely on the oil from the scalp to nourish each braid and the hair to rest from the damaging winds.

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Rowing against the current gets tiring and we easily wear out and quit before we reach the destination, so why wouldn’t I want to collaborate with someone else if we are both going to get the prize?

Why wouldn’t we want to row together with the push of the Holy Spirit’s wind behind us when we know that it can be the difference between spiritual life and death?

Mom used to say, “two heads are better than one.” This was usually true in my case when we were both headed toward the same goal. Let’s Do It Together!

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY FOUR

Question for meditation and discussion

Reflect on Ecclesiastes 4:12

- Who around you helps you from being overpowered?
- Who do you consider a partner?
- Would you say you are easily broken? Or when you are bumped what spills out?

Reflect on Proverbs 27:17

- What are you doing that is sharpening not only you but others around you?
- What are things you can do to be a better teammate?

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY FIVE

That Doesn't Make Sense

By Zach Meerkreebs, First Alliance Church in Lexington, KY

Have you ever been blessed in a way that just does not make sense? Maybe it's your spouse making you breakfast the morning after a nasty argument just to remind you that they aren't going anywhere and they still pick you. Maybe it's your boss that give you another opportunity even when you absolute wasted your first one. Maybe it's a stranger who covers your lunch because you left your wallet in the car. There are a couple emotions, both positive and negative (maybe better stated, awkward) that comes from such an experience.

"Wait, are you sure?"

"You know what I did last time...I just don't know if I can handle it..."

"What...me? Seriously?"

Some of the most impactful blessings I have experienced in my time in this small college town in the bible belt, Lexington, are generous acts of service from other churches and Christian leaders in our city. It is one of those blessings that just doesn't make sense. I am sure they're trying to grow just like me. I am pretty sure they have to figure out space, finances, and discipleship plans...just like me. It just doesn't make sense when they are about my win just as much as theirs. There are plenty of churches here and if you sit in a coffee shop downtown long enough, you'll hear of another church plant coming our way. The reality is that we are not running out of lost people in our city so we need more healthy leaders and healthy churches preaching the BEST NEWS IN THE WORLD, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a culture bubbling up in this city among churches that really see it as a group effort. In fact, it is so potent in some circles that when one leader acts differently, it shines bright like high beams in your rear mirror...no one likes that. The "team" of workers in our context not only is a testament to one another but an on-looking city wondering, "Do they really mean what they say?".

This is where our challenge comes for us as OVD teammates. I can convince you that "Doing it together" is better for mission because the multitude of gifts, the dispersion of responsibilities, etc. etc. etc. But I want to remind us that "Doing it Together" is at its best not just effective and efficient but it, at it's purest form, is a Gospel Witness. This witness is to other believers and Christian leaders AND the contexts we minister in. When we do it together, churches and leaders are buoyed and reminded of the Gospel. We are reminded that the mission is much larger than "_____ Alliance Church"...much larger than the alliance all together. It calls out insecurities, entitlement, competition, and comparison. Doing it together sanctifies and reminds us of God's goodness. Doing it together, more than a shared Christmas event or Missions weekend, shows our neighbors that we mean what we say as well. The on looking world are skeptical...how can our commodore show that Christ in fact is more important than our own score cards, our own annual reports, etc. What if we saw communities come to Christ because we've shown them a community, a team, worth pursuing and living among.

DO IT TOGETHER

DAY FIVE

Let's reach the lost, in Eastern KY, urban Columbus, horse farms near the race tracks, bars in Nashville, college campuses...lets reach the lost by doing it together.

Question for meditation and discussion

How can you help another ministry or church in your context "win"?

What seems a little bit too much to do for another church? Why do you feel that way?

John 13:35 tells us " By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Do the people around you know of your deep intimacy with Jesus because of the way you cheer on, serve and support others around you?

What is one step you can take to do this better?