

Michelangelo or the Tumbler?

The Disciplemaking Strategy of Jesus

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Introduction

Irving Stone, in *The Agony and The Ecstasy*, tells the fascinating story of the life of the renaissance genius Michelangelo. One incident illustrates something of the great mind and powerful imagination of the sculptor. Michelangelo won a commission from the Florentine elders to work on a huge block of marble, *il Duccio*, a “flawed” and mis-cut mass of stone. Other Florentine sculptors assumed the block would break under the strain of the huge gouge in its side. Yet in his mind’s eye he was able to see in the stone a larger-than-life-size image of David, the shepherd boy-man who had killed lions and bears with his bare hands. After four years of painstaking carving, he was able to release the beautiful image of “The David” from the piece of flawed marble, turning the block rejected by others into the most striking sculpture in Florence.

Often, when I hear teaching or read books about disciple-making, it sounds as though leaders or disciple-makers are supposed to resemble Michelangelo, seeing in young Christians raw material waiting to be crafted into mighty men and women of God. It is as if we are to apply our chisel and tools to chip away all that is not Christian Maturity, finally producing a breathtaking work of art we call “The Disciple.”

And yet I find that I don’t identify very closely with Michelangelo. I don’t easily see the final product from beneath the raw block of immature personality and undeveloped gifts. I don’t usually know what is extra stone and what is essential to the particular sculpture. If I applied my chisel I feel all too likely to slip a bit and chop someone’s nose off. I have spent many years investing my life in young Christians, yet the image of a sculptor-discipler leaves me fearful and uncertain.

Let me use another image depicting how rough, ordinary rocks become things of beauty and great value. In order to fashion smooth polished gemstones from ordinary gravel-sized rocks, you use a lapidary tumbler. You put the stones in the tumbler, add a little grit and water, and then close the lid and turn the machine on—for days and weeks, until the rough rocks become smooth, polished gem stones. Of course, the finer the raw material, the more beautiful the final gem, but it is difficult to imagine at the outset exactly what will become of the material that is placed inside the tumbler.

I have come to see that Jesus’ own disciple making strategy was more like polishing gems in a lapidary tumbler. He made disciples in community. As a disciple maker today, my role also is to gather stones for the purpose of tumbling and to add the grit of Scripture study and mission. God empowers the process through an outpouring of the water of his Holy Spirit. The process, over time, involves the stones rubbing up against and falling on one another: conflict, reconciliation, communication, learning to work together and challenge one another (“iron sharpening iron”). This doesn’t make me a passive observer of the process—in fact, I understand myself to be inside the tumbler too! As I land on and chip away at the other stones, I myself am polished and changed. The longer I am in God’s tumbler of community the more I take the shape of the gem God intends me to be.

Both models assume that there is a value to making disciples. The beginning point for either model is Jesus’ great commission: “Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them... and teaching them all that I have taught you.” Jesus tells his disciples to make other disciples, to reproduce the

process Jesus worked in them. We start our discussion of two models of disciple making with the assumption that we want to be disciples of Jesus and we want to help others to grow in their discipleship as well.

Dynamics of the Michelangelo (One-to-One) Model

When I first began learning about ministry, I was a student in a fellowship which taught a one-to-one discipling model. Let me briefly describe some of the characteristics of the discipling process as I understood it then.

- Leaders spent time with people in a variety of settings: small groups, large groups, leadership teams, prayer meetings, and a multitude of social settings. Yet when we thought of “discipling” or discipleship, we thought of the one-to-one meeting between an older Christian, the discipler, and a younger disciple. Our friendships involved time together in many contexts, but we understood the meat of the discipling process to happen in that one-to-one setting.
- Many of the discipleship issues addressed in those one-to-one meetings involved after-the-fact discussions. We would debrief situations, interactions, conflicts, or ministry experiences after we were no longer in the situation itself. As I heard what often sounded like a report, I gave my perspective, helping the younger student learn from his experiences.
- As a discipler I would ask questions regarding the younger student’s ministry or evangelistic relationships. I would try to be with my friend in natural settings for these friendships—this would give me more information to process with him afterwards. But the key discussions, those “light bulb” conversations producing clarity and challenge toward spiritual growth, would happen in the one-to-one setting.

I began to experience more frustration in my efforts to make disciples as I became a staff member working with student leaders who were themselves discipling others. These are some of the recurring patterns I observed.

- **“Who will disciple me?”** Perceptive students entering a fellowship would observe that, to be able to grow and eventually enter leadership, they needed to be in a discipling relationship, hopefully with one of the most experienced leaders. So people began to ask, “Who will disciple me?” It was communicated in a variety of ways that one-to-one discipleship opened the doors to growth and leadership opportunities in the fellowship. People seemed helpless to grow apart from a ready-made one-to-one discipleship relationship.
- **Territoriality and glory.** Just as sculptors don’t like other people to take a chisel to their sculptures, so in a one-to-one model I perceived subtle territoriality on the part of myself or other disciplers regarding the people we were spending time with. Certain younger students became known as “Jen’s person” or “Karl’s person.” Others could take interest but lots of outside influence was not especially welcome. Furthermore, when a sculpture is unveiled, its artist receives the glory. Likewise, as disciplers consider themselves individually responsible for the process, the result is that they receive much of the credit for its success, even if only in subtle ways.
- **Discipler idolatry.** Sometimes the younger disciple became so dependent on and loyal to a single person for their spiritual growth that they couldn’t easily learn from anyone else. In an extreme form this can become an idolatrous attachment to a single person or teacher. Paul is absolutely clear in his reproach of the Corinthian church for their partisan loyalties (“I follow Paul,” “I follow Apollos”).
- **Few master-disciplers available.** Especially as I began to watch seniors graduate from college, I recognized that most churches do not offer one-to-one discipling for their members. I was

frustrated that the kind of relationship I offered people could not continue as they left college, not with me and not likely with anyone else. It seemed that a critical source of spiritual growth and vitality was somehow no longer available to people.

- **Teaching community but modeling individualism.** The biblical value of community became important to me early in my ministry with students, but I was frustrated that the discipling model I pursued relied so much on an individualistic approach. It became clear that it was hard to deeply inculcate the value of community if the high-point of spiritual growth and discipleship was understood as happening in the one-to-one setting of the discipleship relationship.
- **Peer friendships.** My biggest frustration was in the area of peer friendships. I found that in the one-to-one model, peer relationships were de-emphasized. This seemed to be backwards: Jesus told his disciples that by their love *for one another* would they prove their discipleship (John 13:34-35). Yet the one-to-one model emphasized vertical relationships. Everyone had a discipler, an older student or staff helping them grow, and older students had one or more younger disciples who they in turn were helping to grow as Christians. With the relational intensity necessary for this process to be effective, peer relationships weren't convenient. People were subtly evaluated for their success in discipling, so peer relationships, which by definition were not discipleship relationships, didn't count. Even when people did enjoy strong peer friendships, they felt a little guilty because these relationships didn't feel like "discipleship" relationships. Since the relationships were mutual, they were not valued as real ministry.

The Tumbler Model: Another Way

Perhaps the most striking observation we can make about Jesus' disciple making strategy is that his sole disciple making context was the gathered group of disciples. We have *no* record of Jesus spending one-to-one time with *any* of his followers. John's gospel does not tell us of Jesus taking intimate walks on the shore of Galilee with "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Even Peter didn't get one-to-one attention, except when he spoke up and asked for it, and then only in the context of the rest of the disciples, and usually a rebuke at that. So if we tend to conceive of the one-to-one model as normal discipleship strategy, we must at least acknowledge that Jesus didn't practice it. What evidence is there that Jesus conceived his strategy more like the tumbler strategy discussed above?

Jesus gathered a group. The first task of the tumbler-model discipler is to gather rough stones together for the purpose of tumbling in the lapidary of community. This image of *gathering* is an overlooked but frequent biblical metaphor for Jesus' ministry. All the gospels show us the intentionality with which Jesus gathered his first disciples, calling them to himself and to his purposes (e.g., Mark 1:16-20, 2:13; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51). Jesus spoke of his ministry in Matthew 12:30: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." To be on Jesus' team means to gather with Jesus. So Jesus tells us that his ministry of gathering is to be ours as well. We are to gather in his name and continue the process he began. Jesus said in John 4:36: "He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together." He mentioned gathering in the context of his challenge to his disciples to join him in evangelism, for "the fields are ripe for harvesting" (v.35). Jesus intended for us to gather with him, to rejoice with him and participate in his purpose to gather the scattered children of God. Fundamental to Jesus' purpose today is to gather people together.

Jesus added the grit: teachable moments. Much of Jesus' teaching came out of life experiences with the disciples. Rather than working through a curriculum divorced from real-life content, Jesus often responded to the scene, the crowd, the issue or the moment. Topics came up, it seems, more

because of the quantity of time together than because of the detailed plan of discipling or training by Jesus of his disciples. This is how Jesus seized “teachable moments.” A “teachable moment” is a time when people are ready to learn because of their immediate circumstances. Perhaps they acutely feel their need, or they recognize their sinfulness. Perhaps simply their curiosity is piqued. At these times, Jesus addressed personal issues of pride (Mark 9:33-37), greed (Luke 12:13-21), and forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-35). Jesus also addressed ministry topics such as evangelism (John 4:30-38), prayer (Luke 11:1-13), and servanthood (Mark 10:41-45). In each of these cases Jesus’ teaching began as a response to a situation or a question initiated by someone else. Yet Jesus was ready to seize the moment. The issues were crucial; the topics current. He brought his message into the daily lives of his hearers, thus making them into his disciples. He was able to do this because he was keenly aware of his purpose, and yet he was flexible enough to allow the situation to determine how he would pursue it.

Jesus taught in the context of real life because that is where discipleship most needs to happen. For us, discipleship issues are not often current during a one-to-one appointment. A young disciple we meet with may tell a story of his or her own weakness and sinfulness, but will rarely experience temptation during that time. Tumbler disciple making is not accomplished in a series of ten one-to-one, hour-long sessions with one topic per session. Rather, it involves an endless variety of topics and myriad settings in which to discuss those topics and model the character of a disciple. In the tumbler, the seemingly random bumping and sloshing serve to produce elegant polish and shine. Teachable moments provide some of the “grit,” speeding up the polishing process. The goal is to develop in people timeless convictions, values, and character, but the means to accomplishing this goal are varied and situation-specific.

Jesus added more grit: partnership in mission. Jesus’ first disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, understood and appreciated partnership even before they met Jesus: they were partners in a small fishing business. Jesus built on their understanding of partnership to make them the core of his discipleship band, as he trained them all to be “fishers of men.” Eventually, he sent out the 12 (and later the 70) two-by-two for short-term missions trips to preach, teach and heal and to learn from and with each other in the context of ministry. When he sent out his teams, he sent them with no bread, money, extra clothes or provisions—he wanted them to depend on his promises that people would feed and house them. Yet while removing all their material supports, he still wanted each of them to have a partner. Partnership in mission formed a central part of his discipling plan. As the tumbler tumbled them together in faith-stretching circumstances, they had to learn *from* as well as *with* one another.

Probably the most effective tool for our disciple making is to gather together a ministry team and identify a group of people to care for, through evangelistic outreach, teaching, servanthood, or compassion. As your team works together to care for others, you all will learn about yourselves and your deep need for God, for his wisdom and compassion. But you also will learn about each other, and over time you will begin to encourage and challenge one another toward greater love, more effective teaching, more humble servanthood. This kind of team reveals complementary differences between people; eventually your team will identify and affirm the emergent spiritual gifts of its members. Being in ministry together provides the grit to sharpen and enhance the discipling process.

To put it more strongly, Jesus didn’t make disciples in order to send them out; rather, he sent them out in ministry in order to develop them as disciples. If we try to develop disciples in a one-to-one (or even group) context without mission, without an outward focus of our ministry, our lives lack the vital grit that makes the tumbling process so effective at polishing the stones.

Jesus addressed conflict and valued reconciliation. Jesus called the disciples to a high standard in their relationships with one another, especially in his teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation. He stressed the importance of seeking reconciliation and quickly offering forgiveness, when fellow Christians sin against each other (Matt. 5:23ff; 18:15ff.). Whether we have been sinned against or have sinned, as we become aware of it we are to make the first move toward reconciliation. These kinds of interactions contribute to the “stones against stones” dynamic for the tumbler model of disciple making.

Jesus not only taught on the importance of reconciliation, but he also pursued and modeled this high standard with his disciples, again in the group context. When James and John came to him to request a small special favor—to be seated at his right and left in glory!—the rest of the disciples became indignant (Mark 10:35-45). What began as a private matter had poisoned the group of disciples, so Jesus gathered them all and taught on the true nature of greatness in the Kingdom. Not to speak about it with them all would have left tension, suspicion, and resentment festering in the young community of disciples, something Jesus could ill afford. Furthermore, the issue itself indicated that the disciples (all of them) still did not understand the true nature of kingdom leadership and authority. So to leave the issue unaddressed would have been doubly dangerous.

Jesus also took conflict in his relationship with Peter very seriously, in a way for all his disciples to see. When Peter began to rebuke him (Mark 8:31ff) regarding his destiny as the Christ, Jesus looked back at his disciples and rebuked Peter: “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus couldn’t allow Peter’s ideas to spread to control the group’s thinking on the issue of his own destiny and death. Later (Mark 14:29), Peter exalted himself before the others, “Even though others fall away, I will not.” Jesus humbled Peter, again before the others, “You will deny me three times.” And yet, the crown of Jesus’ relationship with Peter in the gospels was once again lived out for the others to see (John 21:15-19). Jesus asked Peter three times, “Peter, son of John, do you love me?” Jesus accepted Peter’s threefold declaration of love in a process of reconciliation and reinstatement that left no doubt in anyone’s mind about Jesus’ love for and forgiveness of Peter.

These examples are clear evidence of the tumbler disciple making model. Disciple makers will sometimes pursue conflict and reconciliation, two delicate interpersonal dynamics, in a group setting because of the potential for deepening the relationships in the group and chipping away at the rough edges of its members. In the tumbler, if stones had feelings, they would feel the pain of the chipping caused by the relentless crush of the other stones. The temporary discomfort of conflict and tension, rebuke and reconciliation in the group setting brings its due reward, as the men and women in the tumbler become more like the One who called them into their discipleship.

Jesus gave them each other. A familiar yet profound disciple maker’s insight observes that Jesus didn’t merely transmit principles to his disciples; he gave himself to them. His time, energy, and life were given away to his disciples in order to develop his character in them. This is a powerful challenge to anyone who would help others grow in their relationship with Jesus. But Jesus did more than give himself to them: he gave them one another. Jesus did not simply call the group together so that they could learn how to love *him* as he had loved them. Yes, he asked them to love him, but significant to our purpose here: Jesus commanded his disciples to love *one another*—their standard was to be Jesus’ love for them (John 15:12, 17). Jesus commanded that they serve one another—even washing each others’ feet (John 13:14)—and again the standard and model was Jesus’ servanthood to them. Jesus prayed to his Father that his disciples be united in love and purpose (John 17:11), and once again Jesus’ own unity with the father is the model. Jesus even said to his disciples that their love for one another would validate his ministry of disciple making with them! (John 13:34-35)

Any disciple making model which fails to take seriously Jesus' priority on peer relationships between his disciples does not fit the model and teaching of Jesus. The tumbler model makes explicit the value and practical role of peer relationships—the multiple stones in the mix. This insight does not let the disciple maker off the hook in terms of the more familiar call to give his or her life for those being influenced: the disciple maker must still do this in order to model and call others into the kind of relationships Jesus desires for his followers.

Corporate disciple making in the early church. I would love to take time to demonstrate how these themes recur in the ministry of Paul as it is illustrated in Acts and his letters. Instead, let me simply point out that corporate disciple making was probably the only kind that happened in the early church. Consider the size of the church before and after Pentecost Sunday: the church grew from 120 believers to over 3000! The only way the new folks could be organized and developed as disciples was in groups and households. Tumbler disciple making, using peer relationships and household groupings, had to be the method for training so many people.

Transition to the Tumbler Model

Steve and Brian were committed leaders in their college fellowship. They each had so much ministry and other activity in their lives that they had little time for peer friendship. Both could see value in a friendship between them, but they never managed to set time aside for it. Finally, I decided to stop meeting with them individually to encourage them to become friends; we all began to meet together regularly with a new leader, Seth. At the time this was not designed as a move toward the model of Jesus—it was a pragmatic desperation attempt to bring about growth in relationships and a more consistent discipling context. But the strength and depth of what the four of us experienced together reshaped my expectations about disciple making. Then as I studied Scripture with opened eyes, I was prepared for a paradigm shift that came as I saw the weight of gospel evidence.

The thesis of this article emerged out of a recognition that the one-to-one disciple making model is deficient for the practical and biblical reasons mentioned above. How do we take the observations of Jesus' tumbler-style disciple making strategy and begin to bring them into the way we practice discipling?

New ways of thinking: First, we will need to think about disciple making in different ways, as the following table illustrates.

One-to-one mentality	Tumbler mentality
We often meet with people in groups, but we assume <i>discipling happens one-to-one</i> . We leave the meat of our influence to the one-to-one setting.	We look for ways to bring disciple making influence into the group settings we <i>already</i> find ourselves in.
With the person we are trying to influence, we assume that <i>our relationship is the only critical one</i> . We tend to overemphasize our role in the process. We then subtly or overtly communicate that it is a friendship with us that will be the key to unlock spiritual growth.	We acknowledge the value of peer relationships, not simply as an <i>end</i> of the discipling process, but as a crucial <i>means</i> and <i>context</i> as well. As we call people into relationship with us as leaders we need also to call them into peer friendships.
When we notice an issue in, say, Kate's style of relating to other people while in a group setting, we tend to think, "I must talk with Kate later about that."	We should consider "going live" with the issue and ask ourselves, "How might Kate benefit from my bringing this up now? How might the group benefit from a discussion of this?" <i>Sometimes</i> the answers to both of these questions indicate we should go ahead.

We tend to feel an ownership of the people whom we are discipling, and outside input into their lives can sometimes be threatening.	We must repent of “territoriality” and look for ways for people to be helped and challenged by others, both peers and other more mature Christians.
Even though we’d like to find mutuality in our discipling relationships, certainly the model presents justification for a unilateral flow of influence, advice, and challenge. We don’t expect to be influenced in reverse.	The mutuality of the tumbler approach is built in to the defining model, as we understand ourselves in need of chipping and polishing, and are subject to the very same process as those we are in discipling.

As we begin to think in different ways about disciple making, we will soon find opportunities to try new approaches in our relationships with younger disciples. Consider the stories of a couple of people who are beginning to view disciple making in a new way:

Sarah is a senior discipling Rachel, a sophomore. Rachel lives with two other Christians who are also in the fellowship. Sarah has spent some time in Rachel’s room getting to know her roommates, but she is focusing on Rachel. How could she reorient her relationship with Rachel to serve more of a tumbler-style discipling process?

Sarah wants to talk to Rachel about her desire for a romantic relationship. Instead of spending time one-to-one, she could bring the group of friends over to her place to see a video of *The Princess Bride* and then to have a discussion regarding our society’s expectations for romance and sexual relationships. The discussion could include honest sharing and a challenge to pursue healthy friendships centered in Jesus. In the four-way discussion, multiple views will come out, not all of which will perhaps be faithful to God’s design for this area of our lives. But as Sarah trusts the process and the desire of each, especially Rachel, to grow in faith, even the expression of alternate views may ultimately be enlightening. Sarah may debrief the conversation with Rachel later, not only clarifying things for Rachel but also giving her vision to continue to be an agent for growth and accountability in her roommates’ lives.

Sarah would like Rachel to consider participation in a Spring break urban mission project, hoping that, among other things, the two of them would spend time together. But Rachel has already begun talking with some of her friends about a joint vacation together over Spring break. Should Sarah try to get Rachel to forget her friends and join her? Suppose Sarah instead helped to give Rachel a vision for inviting her friends all to be part of the Spring break mission team with Sarah. To the attraction of Sarah’s promise of deeper friendship with Rachel would be added the opportunity for Rachel to deepen her peer relationships with other sophomores. A week in intensive ministry together: what a perfect tumbler opportunity!

Jeff is leading a small discipleship group with five younger guys, scheduled from 6-8 PM every Thursday, with the guys usually gathering at 5:15 for dinner. At the end of its fourth two-hour weekly meeting, one of the guys, Ken, announced, “I just made the volleyball team, so that means I will have volleyball practice every week until 6:00. I can grab a quick dinner at my dorm, and I should be able to be here by 6:30 or 6:45. I still really want to be in the group.” The other guys give various responses: “No prob.” “Congratulations!” Silence. At this point, Jeff has a choice. Does he talk about the importance of the group, of each member to the group, and of the commitment they all made just a few weeks ago? Or does he stay silent and not spoil the accepting mood of the group? Perhaps he considers waiting and talking with Ken after the meeting ends.

Now, consider the advantages to the small group and to Ken if Jeff decides to take the direct approach and raise the issue of Ken’s schedule conflict in the group. Jeff might ask the group to stay a little longer to talk about some options for scheduling the group time. After the group agreed, Jeff could ask Ken to talk a little about his reasons for joining the volleyball team. Had Ken considered the cost of time in his schedule? Is there another way for Ken and the group to work

together to solve the time conflict? Perhaps Ken had never considered that the group might be willing to move their group time in order to accommodate his new schedule. To hear from the other group members might be the most powerful way for Ken to come to appreciate the value and priority of the small group.

The result of this process may even be that the group challenges Ken not to join the volleyball team, based on his prior commitments and time constraints. But if Ken does join the team, he would know that the entire small group is behind him, not resenting the burden of rescheduling and eager to help him remain committed to the small group. Each member in the group is called on to commit to Ken in a greater way, so they all grow in their understanding of the value of commitment to the small group. They all grow in their discipleship to Jesus.

This is not meant to imply that these kinds of issues should or could always be dealt with publicly. You will ask yourself, "How would this person respond? How will the group respond?" Sometimes the probable answers make it clear that a one-to-one setting would be more helpful. But not always, and that is my point. At times, this group attempt to care for someone really pays off.

Contexts for the tumbler model.

Discipling using the tumbler model can happen in many different kinds of small groups or teams. Each context requires a gathered group, opportunities to teach and/or minister together (grit), and a leader that welcomes conflict as an opportunity to deepen relationships and polish the stones. Remember, as a leader I am also in the tumbler, and I will have rough edges chipped off as well. Some of the most powerful group times I've seen as a leader have involved my own confession of sin with the group offering me forgiveness.

The following are a few of the settings in which the tumbler can be cranked up to do its thing:

- *Intensive Bible study*, 4-8 people plus one or two leaders, requiring high commitment for members. Each person in the group expects to apply scripture personally and share with the others. The group prays for one another. The peer relationships provide a context for growth and people are expected to take each other's growth seriously.
- *Accountability group*, 3-4 people gathering weekly for sharing, confession, challenge and prayer. This works best in relationships between people who see each other often (and therefore have insight into each other's lives beyond what is confessed or mentioned).
- *Mission group*, a team of people organized around a relational ministry such as leading a dorm Bible study. The relationships on the team are as much a priority as the relationships between leaders and the members of the study.
- *Friendship clusters*, roommate relationships and household communities, where intentionality is added to preexisting peer relationships. Living together can become a tremendous tumbler opportunity, but it can easily be squandered through relational laziness.
- *Summer missions teams* are one of the best tumbler opportunities because of all of the "grit" provided by being in an intensive cross-cultural ministry setting. Look for missions opportunities where partnership and teamwork are a high value.
- *Road trips* with a carload of friends can be powerful tumbler experiences because of the intensity of being in close contact for several days. Consider visiting and/or volunteering with ministries, churches or college fellowships in other cities.

I want to emphasize that a move away from a one-to-one model doesn't mean that disciple makers will not ever spend one-to-one time with people. We will continue to meet with people individually, but probably not as frequently as in the one-to-one model. We will perceive that time differently, as well. A large part of our task in those settings is to do the groundwork that will help people grow in

their peer relationships (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17) and make those tumbler relationships more effective.

Advantages of the Tumbler Model

If we move toward viewing our disciple making ministry as bringing together “tumbler” experiences for the people we work with, we will come to view the entire process differently.

- **Tumbler disciple making takes God’s role seriously.** God gets the credit for the shape of the disciples—he is the one empowering the work of the tumbler. As leaders and disciple makers we play a key role, but the process is beyond our control. We are ourselves shaped by the same polishing work of the same tumbler.
- **Tumbler disciple making takes individual uniqueness seriously.** In any discipling strategy our model is of course Jesus, but this strategy values the uniqueness of each person. We are not crafting disciples in our image, nor even in our particular vision of Jesus. Rather, we don’t know exactly what the finished product will look like when we begin—nor do we need to know. We trust that the process will yield polished disciples, each unique but all having been shaped by a common set of experiences.
- Yet, **tumbler disciple making reinforces the discipleship value of community.** No longer are we meeting one-to-one trying to instill the value of community while modeling individualism. Though this strategy honors the uniqueness of individuals, it calls them to the standard of love for the community that Jesus called his disciples to.
- **Tumbler disciple making puts the role of the discipler in the proper perspective.** This strategy is less likely to produce “discipler idolatry” on the part of younger disciples or territoriality or pride on the part of disciple makers. Because many people—the stones in the tumbler—become influential in the polishing process, and because God superintends the process, the credit goes to God and not the “master-discipler.”
- **Tumbler model disciple making is portable.** Few churches are set up for a thorough one-to-one discipling strategy, and some of those that are seem to abuse the discipling model to become extremely legalistic and authoritarian. The tumbler model is more easily reproduced by people who leave a campus fellowship based on it than is the one-to-one model. Because people have learned how to learn from and mutually influence their peers, they can graduate, remain with or find peer partnerships and friends, and continue helping one another grow in their faith as disciples of Jesus.

Jesus calls all of his disciples into the Great Commission ministry of making disciples of others, and he tells us to do it as he did. Anyone who is consciously trying to make disciples, by any model, is in pursuit of this Great Commission task. Yet disciple making, to be effective and complete, must involve more than a one-to-one approach with people. Our ultimate goal in disciple making is that people come to love God and love other people. This is a proposal to bring the relational quality of the gospel together with a corporate methodology of disciple making that practices what it preaches.