



GOSPEL *for* **LIFE**

**Twelve Principles of
Making Disciples**

Introduction

In the first season of the [Gospel for Life podcast](#), I got to read a dozen books and talk to twelve leading thinkers and practitioners of disciple-making. It was helpful and a lot of fun.

Here are twelve of the key principles I learned, with links for you to follow to find out more.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Darryl Dash". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Darryl Dash

Co-founder, Gospel for Life



1. Making disciples is about living within a different story.

We're all formed by stories, either God's story, or some other story we use to make sense of the world.

Three primary stories shape us today:

- the liberation narrative
- the wellness narrative
- the self-invention story

As we make disciples, help people recognize false stories and help people live in God's story instead.

"I like to think of theology is the study of reality, what is 'in Christ' and that's even more real than what the scientists study, because 'in Christ' is the beginning of a new creation." (Kevin Vanhoozer, author of [Hearers and Doers](#))



[More from Episode 7](#)



2. Discipleship is about transformation at the deepest levels of our lives.

God intends for us to be transformed deeply, including the 90% of us that list beneath the surface.

He also intends for us to live with breadth, learning from the different streams and traditions within the church.

“The deeply formed life is about depth and breadth.” (Rick Villodas, author of [The Deeply Formed Life](#))



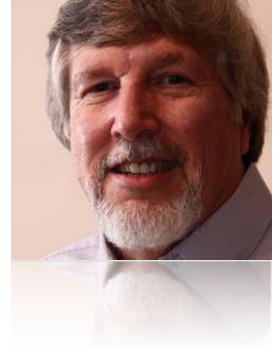
[More from Episode 8](#)

3. We've overcomplicated making disciples.

We tend to drift toward programs and curricula. While these can be useful, making disciples is an intentional relational process.

It's not just about teaching information. It's about inviting people into our lives, and inviting them to walk with us as we walk with God.

"God often works in some slow ways, and also we want to be about building depth in people's lives and not just completing a program." (Bill Mowry, author of [Walk With Me](#))



[More from Episode 12](#)

4. The Bible is central to our walk with God.

We're always going to face resistance to reading the Bible. The enemy of our souls, our own fallen natures, a hostile world, and distraction all conspire against us.

Despite the obstacles, you can learn to know your Bible and love it. Don't just get through the Bible. Wrap your arms around it. Enjoy it.



"If you have 50 more years left in your life, why not get to know the Bible and really enjoy the process?" (Nate Pickowicz, author of [How to Eat Your Bible](#))

[More from Episode 2](#)

5. Growing in Christ involves knowing Scripture, knowing God, and building disciplines.

Every believer needs to learn to:

- participate in the biblical story (the Bible)
- grow in their knowledge of who God is and who we are (theology), and
- regularly participate in private and corporate intentional action (spiritual disciplines).



“The disease isn't that we're too deep. It's that we're far too shallow. We need local churches who want to invite people into the depths and the richness of having a relationship with Jesus and the Triune God.” (J.T. English, author of [Deep Discipleship](#))

[More from Episode 5](#)

6. Habits play a key role in our walk with God.

We often wait for desire to lead us into action. Instead, we can use habits to lead us into desire.

“Bodily motions and habits can inscribe faith far more deeply in us than just at the information level.” (Jen Pollock Michel, author of [A Habit Called Faith](#))



[More from Episode 4](#)

7. Discipleship involves our whole lives, including our bodies.

God created us as embodied beings. Our bodies play an important role in our relationship with God.

Whenever we can, we should preach and teach and disciple about embodiment. We should talk about not only spiritual disciplines, but also physical disciplines, exercise, nutrition, rest, and sleep.



“The foundation for our relationship with God is the fact that we are embodied. That's the beginning point.” (Gregg Allison, author of [Embodied](#))

[More from Episode 9](#)

8. Pastors play a crucial role in making disciples.

Seminaries do certain things well, but the church is the ideal environment for making disciples.

Pastors can set the expectation of what normal Christianity looks like.

If you want your church to adopt a culture of discipleship, start by setting an example.

Don't try to impose a discipleship program overnight. Start small and grow.

"Discipleship is messy and takes time. It requires great patience. It requires a faithful plodding." (Jared C. Wilson, author of [Gospel-Driven Ministry](#))



[More from Episode 6](#)

9. As you make disciples, help follow Jesus in their particular time and place.

It's not enough to think about discipleship in a timeless sense. We must work out what it means to follow Jesus in the particular time in setting that we've been placed.



Developing general habits is good, but we must also develop subversive habits that confront the particular temptations and challenges we're going to face the as Christians today.

"The gospel is timeless, but we must work out what it means to follow Jesus in the particular time and setting that we've been placed." (Trevin Wax, author of [Eschatological Discipleship](#))

[More from Episode 1](#)

10. Developing healthy digital habits is an important discipleship challenge.

Most of us have made digital content our main input, and it's making us sick.

Churches can help train people in media literacy and the development of healthy digital habits.

"Even your average faithful church-going Christian is actually being disciplined more by their online habits and echo chambers." (Brett McCracken, author of [The Wisdom Pyramid](#))



[More from Episode 3](#)

11. Help people face distortions of Christianity.

Key influencers are peddling false versions of the Christian faith. One example is the new prosperity gospel. This distortion of Christianity is hip, focuses on giving a good experience, and promises that you will live an extraordinary life.



“I worry, not only are we following a version of God that we've made up and we've constructed, but also we're setting up a generation for major disappointment with God when all their dreams don't really come true.”
(Dean Inserra, author of [Getting Over Yourself](#))

[More from Episode 10](#)

12. Help people face objections to Christianity.

We live in a culture that's hostile to Christianity.

Sometimes we avoid preparing people to deal with objections to Christianity. The church can and should expose people to these ideas, and prepare them to deal with them.



"One of the ways to prepare students for college is to introduce them and expose them to non-Christian thinking in some sort of way that normally we don't do." (Michæl Kruger, author of [Surviving Religion 101](#))

[More from Episode 11](#)

Questions

1. What is the principle that surprised you the most?
2. Which principles are the strongest in your life and ministry?
3. Which principles need more attention in your life and ministry?
4. What is one practical step you can take to implement one of these principles?