



I need to repeat myself and quickly review the last several weeks of messages because it is absolutely crucial to understanding this morning’s message. The Discipleship Ingredients are always self-explanatory. The past three weeks we have spent time on the Discipleship Environment of the church and the family while also weaving in the Discipleship Process of Connect, Grow, Equip and Multiply. These three pieces to the discipleship puzzle are non-

**NON-NEGOTIABLE
ORGANIC CHURCH**

1. **Discipleship Ingredients**—the Bible and the Holy Spirit
2. **Discipleship Environment**—the church and the family
3. **Discipleship Process**
Connect—Grow—Equip—Multiply



**NEGOTIABLE
MINISTRY TRELLIS**

4. **Discipleship Structure**—The Trellis of ministries that supports the Living Vine.

negotiable. Each of them are Biblically founded and mandated. These are also non-negotiable because they describe the Organic Church. Each believer is a living, spiritual entity, every local church is a living spiritual entity and the entire kingdom of God is a living, spiritual entity. This is why we have been using the term organic church all along. If you are not certain that these are Biblically mandated and non-negotiable for the

believer, then please read, listen or review the last four weeks of messages. I have taken great care to lay this out and thus far, I have not had a single disagreement.

The fourth piece of the puzzle, the Discipleship Structures, are what we plan to discuss this morning. These structures, what are most often called church “programs,” are the trellis of ministries that support the living vine. This piece is fully negotiable precisely because it is not alive. If we zoom in on the picture of our vine (below), we can see the small shoots that the vine uses to attach itself to trellis. Like a vine, the organic church must have a trellis of ministries to attach itself to allow it to grow.

We must have a trellis. I don't mean that it is negotiable in the sense that it doesn't matter if we have it or not, but it is negotiable in the sense that the exact type of trellis is not that important. The only thing that matters is that we build a trellis that will help us grow *this* kind of a vine. Our trellis of ministries must help us to accomplish the non-negotiable pieces of the discipleship puzzle.



To put it more specifically, our trellis of ministries must help us to be dependent upon the Bible and the Holy Spirit for everything that we do. Our trellis of ministries must assist us in creating a balance of connection, spiritual growth, mutual equipping for ministry and multiplication of ministry. Finally, our trellis of ministries must achieve some kind of balance between the environments of the church and the family. If the family is fundamentally responsible for discipling their own children, then the church must not in any way usurp the rights and responsibilities of the parents. However, there is so much the church can do to assist this process.

Are you seeing the difference between the non-negotiable and the negotiable parts of discipleship? Have you come to an understanding of how the trellis and the vine work together?¹ I sincerely hope that you, because here is the exact place that most churches stumble. What's more important—the trellis or the vine? Of course the vine is vastly more important, but when it comes to church programs, many churches fail to realize this. In many churches, the programs become so engrained in the tradition of the church, they are such sacred cows that far too many people falsely believe that the programs are the most important thing.

AWANA is a good example of this. I love my former church, but AWANA was so much a part of the tradition of that church that no pastor could ever survive cancelling the program. I don't care how much clout you had, but if you went to the church and said, "Look, it's either I go or AWANA goes," they would tell you, "Don't let the door hit you on the way out." Such ministries are to pastors as what social security is to a politician—it is the third rail and if you touch, you are dead. Did I say there is anything wrong with AWANA? No, I did not. I think very highly of AWANA. Ryan started his AEANA career at our old church and was in the first batch of students ever to earn his Timothy Award at Bethesda. In the past, Bible quizzing has had a similar stranglehold over some churches, and you know how much I appreciate our Bible quiz ministry.

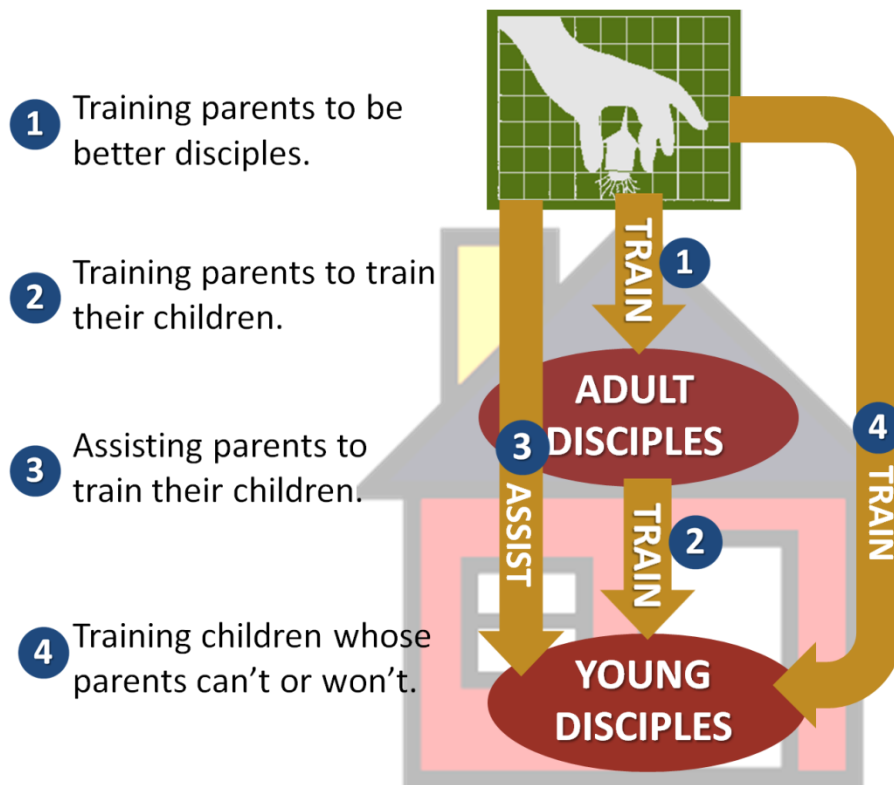
All of these are good programs and they very well may be the best programs for that particular church for that particular time. But even this should never change the fact that no program should ever be non-negotiable, because programs are the trellis and not the vine. Do you see how a proper understanding of these categories will keep a church focused on the right priorities? The vine determines what kind of trellis you use, not the other way around. The trellis is negotiable but the vine is not. The vine is alive, but the trellis is not—it's just a trellis.

Now that you have a handle on the distinction between the trellis and the vine, let me show you how we try to balance the two discipleship environments of church and family, keeping in mind that the parents and not the church, are responsible for discipling their children.

The first step is for the church to train parents to be better disciples. This is not done through a special discipleship program but rather flows out of everything we do as a church. This is the core of all good relationships. What do you do if you want a better marriage? Usually the first response to that question is to look outward. If I don't have a great marriage, the lion's share of the blame obviously falls on the other person, right? But that is always the wrong place to start, because if you want a better marriage, you first need to become a better husband or a better wife. The first question should be, "How is my walk with the Lord? Am I growing in my faith? Am I seeking Godly counsel? Do I have anyone in my life who is showing me my blind spots? Am I actively growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ?"

The exact same thing is true of parenting. Raising your children is all about Christian discipleship and if you are not firmly on that path, seeking to be continually transformed by the Lord, then you will not be able to lead your children down this path.

Right about now I can imagine that some of you have this question in your minds. "Are you telling me that if I don't have a good marriage that it is all my fault? Are you telling me that if I am struggling with my children it is all my fault? What kind of a guilt trip are you putting me on anyway?"



- 1 Training parents to be better disciples.
- 2 Training parents to train their children.
- 3 Assisting parents to train their children.
- 4 Training children whose parents can't or won't.

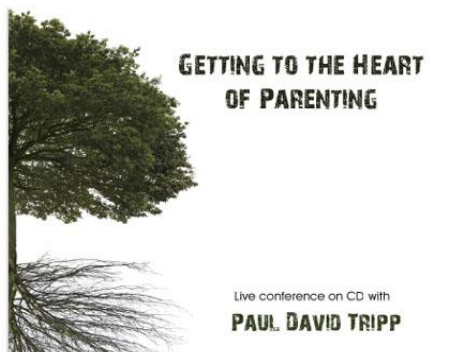
Please understand that I have no desire to add a thousand pound weight of guilt upon your shoulders. I am a parent and I know what guilt feels like. I am not suggesting that a struggle in your marriage or a struggle in your parenting is all your fault, but I am saying that you are responsible to be the best follower of Christ that you can be. The best thing you can do for your marriage is to grow your faith and the best thing you can do for your parenting is to

grow your faith. There are endless good books and resources on these important relationships, but if you are not growing in humility, love and self-control, then you will most likely not be able to make progress in your relationships with your husband, wife and children.

Moreover, the best thing you can do for your parenting is to have a great marriage. Do you understand why this is true? First of all, if you have a great marriage, or at least a marriage that is getting stronger, then you have no doubt started to live out concepts like sacrificial love and humility. Therefore, you can begin to apply these areas of spiritual growth to your parenting. Second, children always thrive within the context of a healthy marriage between their parents. They feel more secure, more safe and more loved in this healthy environment and are more likely to grow in their own faith.

Therefore, now that you are convinced that it is your responsibility to disciple your children, your first question should not be, “What kind of Bible study material should I use? What is the best curriculum for the age of my kids?” Instead, your very first question should be, “How am I doing with the Lord?” It is impossible to give what you do not have. The trellis or programs that apply to point #1 would be anything and everything we do as a church from Sunday morning worship to a home Bible study—anything that can help you be better disciple, a better husband and a better wife.

In this [video clip](#), Kevin Swanson, expert on family discipleship, offers a challenge to us all from the new documentary called *Divided*.



The second step in discipling children is to train parents to train their children. This step is needs to happen a little more intentionally. We are currently doing two different things to better equip parents. The first is that we will be scheduling a weekend DVD seminar called Getting to the Heart of Parenting. This will be a Friday night and Saturday sessions here at the church. We will let you know as soon as this is on the calendar.

The second thing we are doing is developing a list of resources for youth and family discipleship.

On our diagram I have placed a picture of a house which is intended to represent that the home is the backdrop to all discipleship. As I said last week, many church unintentionally usurp the rights and responsibilities of the parents by offering programs for every age and every possible need of children. As a church, the last thing we want to do is replace the God-given and high privilege of the parents but to come alongside the parents—to encourage and challenge them to consistent discipleship. What I am describing is a partnership between the church and home where the church clearly teaches parents that it is their responsibility and the church does all it can to support their endeavors.

Before we move on in our diagram, I want to stop and say something of a general nature about discipleship. I am guessing that whenever I say the word “discipleship,” the vast majority of you are conjuring up a picture of dad and mom sitting in the living room reading the Bible or praying

with your child at bedtime. I think that is what you imagine because even I tend to think of the word discipleship in these ways. If you recall from last week, one of our conclusions is that parenting is discipleship. Our working definition of discipleship is as follows: *The instructor teaches, trains, punishes and chastises the student and this process is called discipleship.* If parenting is the same thing as discipleship, then discipleship is the same thing as parenting. We are not asking you to write a complete Bible curriculum for your children. Discipleship is good, consistent parenting that trains a child to fear the Lord. Therefore, when we say the word discipleship, I want you to have the whole parenting task in mind—from changing diapers to shuttling them to soccer games.

The third step in the church and home partnership assisting parents to train their children. Most of the ministries in our church probably fall into this category.

KWAM Youth Club: This is a monthly youth club for kids eight to eighteen with the purpose of training our youth to have a vision for missions and to develop their spiritual gifts of service. During regular club meetings we have a Bible study time, fellowship and planning for outreach. We also have regular service projects, mission trips, mission's related fundraisers and skits for outreach. We also hold social gatherings like canoe trips and Christmas parties.

Bible Quizzing and Youth Study: Most of you are probably aware of this ministry but I am guessing that most of you don't know all there is to our quizzing program. First and most obvious, there is the Bible quizzing portion. Quizzers memorize as much or as little as they want. A few quizzers do memorize hundreds of verses every year, but the average is more like 75-100. If you were to learn 30-50 verses in a year and know them very well, you could be very active as a quizzer. But in addition to the quizzing, weekly meetings also include separate team devotional time, which is like a mini small group time and team building activities. The monthly tournaments afford the opportunity to interact with youth from other churches in our area since Badgerland Bible Quizzing is made up of ten area churches. After the regular quiz practice time on Wednesdays, there is also a youth study where we have emphasized apologetics and missions. So as you can see, there are multiple parts to the Bible quizzing ministry.

Youth Service Opportunities: The youth at Grace Church are encouraged and invited to develop in their Christian growth through service in the church. Many youth are involved in serving in the nursery, children's church, on worship teams, and running and designing the power point presentations. This also affords the opportunities for our youth to develop relationships with and to be mentored by other adults in the church.

Mission's Trips: We have participated in three mission's trips in past years and have several more planned for the near future, including three trips to Haiti and an inner city trip to Milwaukee or Chicago. Each of these trips has been multi-generational with parents attending with children, when possible. These trips have been life changing for the youth. More than one youth has felt called into full-time missions work, others have repented of sins, committed to life change, experienced the opportunity to see God work through their ministry—all while having a great time together!

Each of these ministries can be classified as “assisting parents to train their children” for two reasons. First, these ministries offer children and teens unique opportunities that you might not

be able to get at home. Second, our desire would be to have most parents involved in these ministries along with their kids. For example, Bible quizzing is one of the most parent involved ministries I have ever seen. Parents are invited to watch or participate with their children in any of our ministries.

Finally, we get to #4—Training children whose parents can't or won't. Even though the Biblical standard is that parents disciple their own children, the reality is that not every parent will do this. Some cannot disciple their children because they are not believers. Some parents could disciple their children but for whatever reason, they won't. We would like to be able to train and equip those parents and perhaps help the unsaved parents find salvation, but these are the two populations of parents who cannot or will not disciple their own children. Therefore, all of the ministries I just described are available even if there is not any parent involvement.

By now you are familiar with the discipleship goals, the discipleship environments, the discipleship processes and the trellis of ministries. You can see the living vine of the church and understand that it is non-negotiable. You understand the trellis of ministries that we have at Grace Church and are beginning to understand why I refer to them as negotiable. The trellis supports the vine and not the other way around. From this point forward, every piece of our trellis must be evaluated and driven by the living vine of discipleship.

But after all that we have covered the past four weeks, what type of trellis could pull all of these things together? The answer, I am convinced, is Life Groups. Life groups are a great point of connection. They connect believers to other believers and Lord willing, they will help connect unbelievers to Jesus Christ. There is an outreach component of Life Groups that we regularly emphasize. Life Groups are also a place to grow. Most Bible studies concentrate on Biblical knowledge and life groups are no exception, but we do not want them to be only a place for Bible study.

Life Groups are intended to be a place to equip one another for ministry. I have challenged my Life Group on many, many occasions to consider which of them will be the leaders of the next group. If they are healthy, life Groups will multiply. They will multiply leaders, they will multiply groups and Lord willing, they will multiply conversions and spiritual growth. . Our vision is to have a Life Group in several locations covering the geographical area of the people in our church.

And because Life Groups are intentionally multi-generational, they can be an ideal partnership between the family and the church. In Life Groups, all four of the parts of discipling children can take place. Parents will be trained to be better disciples. Parents can learn how to train their own children. Parents are assisted in the training of their children and Life Groups can even be a place where young people attend without their parents

If you know me, you know that I am not consumed with the ABC's of church life—attendance, building and cash (or as some call it, the 3 B's—Bodies, Buildings and Bucks). But I do think this chart of our worship attendance since the start of our church is quite interesting. We have had our ups and downs in our brief history, but I think the Lord has allowed us to continue to develop a Biblically healthy church. Attendance has been moving in a good direction and this summer is the first year ever that we have not had a deficit in our budget over the summer months. Truly, the Lord is blessing. Some would look at this chart knowing we recently moved into a new building and conclude that the building is the key to our numerical growth, as is often true when a church builds its first building. However, about half of the current growth occurred before we moved into the new building. Again, my only explanation is the blessing of the Lord.



As a church, we will continue to evaluate all we do by these discipleship principles. I would challenge you to do the same. Based upon what you have learned in the past five weeks, what do you need to do next? What step is necessary to help yourself and/or your family in the next phase of their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ?

Rich Maurer
July 24, 2011

¹ Up until this point, I have failed to give recognition for the title of this message. Colin Marshall and Tony Payne have written an outstanding book by the same title (Matthias Media, © 2009). I have adopted phrase because I think is the ideal metaphor for describing the living church/kingdom, THE VINE, and the programs of the church, THE TRELLIS.