Imagine with me if you will, that you get a call from the US Olympic committee. Now I know this will be a stretch for some of you but just work with me.

Suppose the voice on the other end of the line said the National Olympic committee had selected you to represent the United States at the London Olympic Games this summer and they wanted you to run the marathon.

This would be a great honor; hundreds of millions of people around the world watching as you compete against the best runners in the world in a twenty-six mile race for the gold.

But most of us would not be ready. My idea of a race is from the recliner to the fridge during the commercial. And the thought of wearing those skimpy running shorts....not a pretty picture.

But, what if they had called last summer and you had a year to train. And, they promised to assign to you the world’s best trainer to give you instructions and help you prepare.

If you are serious about competing, you’d have to enter into a life of training. You cannot run a marathon simply by going out and trying—not even by trying very hard.

Instead, you must rearrange your schedule, reprioritize your activities. Your life would have to change to enable you to
eventually do what you cannot do now. Even great willpower would not be enough.

This analogy of running is the same one used by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 to describe discipleship.

“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, (it will tarnish and corrode) but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. (this isn’t just practice anymore, so) I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.”

Our problem is that most of us when we talk about being a spiritual person or an authentic disciple, we think we simply have to try harder to be like Jesus Christ. So we try hard to be patient, to be kind, to be loving. But it works no better that trying to win a marathon without any training.

Today we’re talking about God’s Training Manual for Discipleship; it is not about trying; it’s about training. We have been called to a life of spiritual training.

Now don’t misunderstand. God is not trying to load some heavy burden that on you.

In fact, straining, overexertion does not help at all. To train spiritually means to allow the Holy Spirit to use the experiences and relationships of life to bring about the spiritual changes that he desires.

Those 3½ years Jesus spent with his disciples was Bible bootcamp. There are certain spiritual training disciplines that Jesus gives us, but they are not the joyless, rigorous, and even painful activities we might expect. And, the payoff is enormously satisfying.
With the Bible as our training manual here are
1ST TEN BIBLICAL DISCRIPTIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP:

1. DISCIPLESHIP IS ESSENTIAL, NOT OPTIONAL FOR CHRIST-FOLLOWERS.

Luke 9:23-24 “Then he said to the crowd ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.’”

I think that was Judas’ problem; remember him; the one who betrayed Christ? I don’t think Judas ever gave up on his personal ambition.

When he figured out that Jesus was headed for a dead end (literally), he bailed; he took what he could get; he tried to make the best of a bad situation and traded on his knowledge of where Jesus was to fill his pockets.

2. DISCIPLESHIP IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION.

It’s not a destination that we arrive at. It’s a journey that we are on. Mine started over 50 years ago. Some of yours are just beginning.

It’s an adventure with God. Remember how Jesus invited his disciples to come and “be with him.” Discipleship is going on a spiritual journey with Jesus. But when Jesus left, the journey didn’t stop.

3. DISCIPLESHIP IS GOD’S WORK, BUT IT REQUIRES OUR PARTICIPATION.

God is at work in us, but we have to yield to what he wants to do. Do you know why some people hold their
hands up in church? This is the universal sign of what? SURRENDER!

Romans 6:13(GNT) says, “Give yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes.”

4. DISCIPLESHIP IS INVOLVES DISCIPLINES, EXPERIENCES, AND RELATIONSHIPS.

God uses these to help us grow into authentic Christ-likeness. Disciplines, these are like spiritual calisthenics, daily exercises that strengthen our spiritual muscles.

Experiences, everyday is filled with them and each one is orchestrated by the Great Composer of the universe to bring his music into our lives.

Have you ever seen an orchestral score? Believe it or not, my undergraduate degree was in music. And one of my most enjoyable musical memories was conducting an orchestra. I actually got to do that on numerous occasions.

The amazing thing about an orchestral score is that every note on the page has to sync with every other note. There are woodwinds and strings and brass and rhythm instruments and each has a part to play.

And much like us in life, they PLAY BY FAITH. They play their designated part trusting that the arranger who notated the orchestration knew what he was doing; that he put the right notes in the right place on the page.

In other words, each instrument, and there could be a hundred or more, must play the notes written and the
notes written must be in sync with all the others written in order to produce the musical sounds intended.

God is in charge of the orchestration of our lives. If we each go off on our own; do our own thing, disharmony and dissonance results. But living according to HIS leading, insures the harmonies he intends and the enjoyment only he can compose.

“God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” Roman 8:28

5. DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT COMPARTMENTALIZED. God is not interested in my spiritual life; he interested in my life—all of it.

I’ve heard people make an erroneous differentiation between the sacred and the secular; sacred music/secular music; religious activities and non-religious; even words.

To God, everything is sacred; everything is important. Jesus said, “I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak.” Matthew 12:36

6. DISCIPLESHIP SHOULD BE HAPPENING EVERY MOMENT. It is not restricted to certain times or special activities. It’s 24/7, from cradle to casket. He has a plan for this life as well as the one to come.

From the moment you open your eyes in the morning till the moment you go to sleep at night, God wants to be involved in your life.

Jesus said I came to give you life and life abundantly. Some of you may be asking, then why am I not
experiencing the abundant life he promised? It’s because we keep messing it up. We keep leaving him out.

7. **DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT FOR LONERS.** Rather, it takes place in community and finds expression in relating to others. There are no Lone Ranger disciples. (I think I just dated myself.) God said it’s not good for man to be alone. Serial killers are loners – it’s unhealthy.

I believe babies are supposed to be born into families. That’s the way nature works; that’s the way God designed it. People around us help us grow healthy.

8. **DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT LIMITED.** It is not impeded by a person’s background, temperament, life situation, or season of life.

It is available right now to all who desire it; no child left behind. There is not one who doesn’t qualify. Everyone gets to play. Nobody sits it out on the bench.

9. **DISCIPLESHIP DOES VARY.** Disciples don’t all look alike. Authentic disciples are handcrafted, not mass-produced. The Bible says we are a body, intended to work together but each one of us is a different part; has a different role.

10. **DISCIPLESHIP IS ULTIMATELY MEASURED BY OUR CAPACITY TO LOVE.** An increased capacity to love God and people is the sign of real transformation. Other superficial or external checklists cannot measure it.

Remember the Grinch that stole Christmas?

Every Who down in Whoville liked Christmas a lot, But the Grinch, who lived just’ north of Whoville, did not.

The Grinch hated Christmas — the whole Christmas season. Oh, please don't ask why--no one quite knows the reason.
It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight. It could be his head—wasn't screwed on just right. But I think that the most’ likely reason of all May have been that his heart’ was two sizes too small.

In the movie they had a machine that x-rayed his chest and measured his heart, and obviously, it is two sizes too small. In the story the Grinch steals all the presents in the middle of the night.

Then from his perch atop the mountain north of Whoville he waits expectantly for all the sad sounds from Whoville when they discover that there will be no Christmas. But instead of sad sounds he hears singing, joyful singing.

He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME! Somehow or other, it came just the same! And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling: How could it be so? It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes, or bags! And he puzzled and puzzled, till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! "Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas... perhaps... means a little bit more."

Eventually, the Grinch figures it out and his heart grows, three sizes in one day. But see that machine – WE DON’T HAVE ONE OF THOSE. We have no way to measure your heart.

1 John 4:17 “As we live in God, our love grows more perfect.” We can’t see your heart grow, but we can look for the results; the fruit.

Those are ten Biblical descriptions of Discipleship. Now
**2ND HERE ARE FIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR DISCIPLESHIP:**

1. **YOU NEED A GOAL.** God is not interested in **training** for training sake. Training has no value by itself. If we’re going deep just for depth sake; just so we can **brag** about how spiritual we are – that’s **pride**, the **king** of sins.

That’s like **body builders**, who commit to a **strenuous** physical program of **exercise** and **diet** just to **look** good. **Some** even enter bodybuilding **competitions**, where they **strut** about on a **stage** and display their **well-oiled** and **sculptured** physiques.

There is a **goal** for our training and it’s **not** just to **show off** how spiritual we are. We are **training** is to make us more **like Christ** and to equip us for making more **disciples**; expanding his **Kingdom**.

Our goal is **clear**. **After 3½** years of training, Jesus **turned** to his disciples and said now it’s **your turn**. “**Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”** Matthew 28:19-20

**We’re** training to be **disciple makers.** Jesus said “**Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching...** 24 **Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.**” John 14:23-24

His **last command** was to go and make disciples. If we **love** him we **obey**.

1**st** we need a **goal**, then we need a **coach**.
2. YOU NEED A COACH

Now coaches for us, are what we’ve called intentional leaders. They are the ones who call the group together. They don’t have to be pastors or seminary grads. They just have to be willing to take the lead.

After all, they are not making disciples for themselves. They are facilitating people becoming disciples of Christ.

Have you ever seen a mother duck leading her ducklings? Momma duck is in the lead, but only one duck is actually following momma. All the other ducks are following another baby duck.

What’s required to be a leader is to be one step ahead of those following you. You just keep your eyes on momma. Our Quad leaders are those leading our gender specific groups through our discipleship curriculum. Each one of them has a “line of support”. They have someone who is a little more experienced, maybe just one step ahead, checking in with them.

We also have monthly discipleship dinners. We enjoy a delicious dinner together and then share with each other what we are learning and experiencing in our groups.

These dinners are crucial to group leaders and a great motivation to all group members. Dinner plus the meeting is only 1½ hours. Child care is provided.

Discipleship requires a goal, and coach and coach

3. YOU NEED A TEAM

Don’t go it alone. God designed us to grow in groups. You help me; I help you. “A person standing alone can
be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:12

Because discipline doesn’t come naturally to most of us, we need to seek a small group of people who help nurture for our souls.

One TV report recently noted that 70% of Americans don’t exercise. Of the 30% who do exercise, only 10% exercise alone.

The remaining 90% who exercise, do so because of accountability or encouragement from friends. When it come to spiritual exercise, it’s absolutely essential to attach ourselves to a group. Jesus gave us this example himself with his group.

I’ve never known anyone to make significant spiritual gains without the help of friends. I’ve heard many people say, “I really want to grow spiritually.”

But unless they submit themselves to the help of others, they’re not likely to grow,... apart from suffering. Now suffering is the one tool God uses to cause us to grow, but usually when we’ve been stubborn and resistant to his preferred method.

Suffering is not the path I recommend. The help of others is a more enjoyable way of becoming discipled and growing spiritually. A goal, a coach and a team; now you need a regimen.

4. YOU NEED A REGIMEN

Most of us think of discipline as negative. We discipline our children when they misbehave. Soldiers might face disciplinary action when they don’t follow orders.
A **boss** might put an **employee** through a **probationary** period, as a **disciplinary** measure for not meeting certain goals.

But practicing **spiritual** disciplines has much more of a **preemptive** and **positive** quality. Spiritual disciplines develop **habits** of the **heart** that make us more **capable** of carrying out **assignments** God has for us.

**Jesus** asked **Peter**, **James** and **John** to **wait** and **pray** nearby, while **he went** to wrestle with his **Father** about the **difficulty** of the crucifixion that lay ahead. **Three** times he came back and found these disciples **asleep**.

**Then** Jesus spoke those most **memorable** words: **“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** Matthew 26:41. He was **right**. The disciples **loved** Jesus but they **failed** him. They didn’t **just** fall **asleep**, the eventually **deserted** him. We need a spiritual **regimen** to build spiritual **strength**.

1 Timothy 4:7 says, **“Train yourself to be godly.”**

Here’s a **brief** list of disciplines, **spiritual calisthenics** that will help us **begin**.

- **Discipline of God’s Word**

  The **Bible** is like **manna** for us. God **provided** manna in the **wilderness** to feed his people on their **journey** to the Promised Land. **Every morning** they were to get up and **collect** the manna they needed.

  If they collected **too much** it would **spoil** and be full of **maggots** the next day. This was a **discipline** of **dependence** that taught the Israelites to **come** to him each **morning** for the daily **nourishment** they needed.
Most of you know what I mean when I say “knees before feet” don’t you? This is a discipline that the men that meet at Denny’s on Friday morning hold each other accountable for.

We hit our knees before we hit our feet each morning. We start our day in prayer, recognizing that God has given us another day to enjoy and serve him. After I finish my prayer time each morning, I go down the hall to have my time in the Word.

I call this “bread before breakfast”. Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4

I typically spend time each morning reading from God’s Word and journaling on what I read. I need the nourishment.

You don’t have time to study the Bible? Bible study is an investment. You don’t have enough time not to study the Bible. The Bible helps us get it right the first time.

Could you build a building with no blueprints? Have you ever tried to put a 1000 piece puzzle together without looking at the picture? Life is like a million piece puzzle.

Make it a daily habit. The best time is when you are at your best.

• The discipline of prayer

Not only do I hit my knees before I hit my feet but I try to spend time every day, praying for my family – my wife, children, grandchildren; my brother, two sisters and their families; my wife’s extended family. Then I pray for people of this church mentioning many of you by name.
The Apostle Paul said we should “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) What I think he meant was that we are to be in constant conversation with our heavenly Father.

It’s keeping the line of communication open all day long; realizing that He is listening in on everything I say, and I can access his input whenever I need it.

• The discipline of Scripture Memory

One of the great components of our Discipleship curriculum is the requirement to memorize scripture every week. Some of you don’t think you can do that, but you can.

Joshua 1:8 says “Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.” For me, being able to quote a verse or two from memory at my quad meeting requires that I go over and over it in my head all week long – that’s meditation. It can’t help but impact the way I think and the way I act. It’s God’s Word echoing around in my head all week—it’s great.

• The discipline of worship

“Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” Psalm 95:6

Worship is the way God has designed to free us from ourselves. We come into this world very selfish and self-centered. It’s all about us, our wants, our needs, our appetites.
When we come into worship, suddenly there’s something more important than me. It’s God. I’m suddenly aware that I am in the presence of God.

Now this is difficult for some – to get out of the way; take ourselves out of the center of attention; to realize that worship is not about me and meeting my needs or pleasing me; but rather it’s about God.

But if we don’t, it’s not worship—it’s idolatry. As two women left a worship service, one complained, “I didn’t really care for that.” Her friend reprovingly responded, “Good, because we weren’t worshipping you.”

The only thing that matters about our worship is that God cares for it; he’s pleased with it.

I come to acknowledge his rule in my life; to give him thanks for the myriad of blessings I enjoy; to ask him for strength and wisdom for the challenges I face.

Again, we lift up our hands in surrender, acknowledging that He is our Lord. He is God and I am his creation. He has the right to ask anything of me that he wants.

- The discipline of giving

Giving is God’s way of freeing me from greed and worry. It’s typical for us human beings to worry about money. Though we’re one of the wealthiest nations on earth, we’re always worrying if we’re going to have enough.

The Training Manual encourages us to learn to give. There is an amazing miracle that happens when we practice this discipline – we become less and less materialistic and more and more contented with what we have.

There are numerous other disciplines that help us grow, like witnessing which is a source of great joy for our lives. There is
service where we use our special strengths to help other. This adds a great sense of purpose and satisfaction.

The discipline of obedience insures humility, and the discipline of love results in great emotional health.

We’ve talked about four requirements of discipleship – a goal, a coach, a team and a regimen. The final requirement for discipleship is time.

5. YOU NEED TIME

“When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, ‘If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’ So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea.” Exodus 13:17-18

The Israelites left Egypt, and were headed to a place that God had promised them, that was about 2 weeks away.

The problem was, that instead of heading due East and then a little North, like they expected, he led them south. To the Israelites, God was leading them in the wrong direction. Was God directionally challenged? Instead of two weeks, it took Israel 40 years to get to the Promised Land.

Someone observed that it didn’t take 40 years to get Israel out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel. God’s path is not always the quickest route, but it is the BEST route for us in our situation.

God is rarely in a hurry. Our training takes a lifetime. But Jesus said, I will be with you always, even till the end of the age. But he guarantees the journey will be a great adventure.