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The Discipleship Mirage - Part 4
An Introduction to Christian Worldview Discipleship Training

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You can read part 1 at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/07/the-discipleship-mirage-part-1-what-is-the-discipleship-mirage/>

You can read part 2 at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/07/the-discipleship-mirage-part-2-the-quest-for-a-comprehensive-approach-to-discipleship-training/>

You can read part 3 at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/07/the-discipleship-mirage-part-3-creating-a-disruptor/>

Let me start you out with a question: What good are random facts or acts without a unifying theme? For instance, can you identify any tasks you do related to work, church life, family, or other parts of your life that exist in isolation? Let's look at a simple illustration of how this might play out.

Explain what the following words have in common: campfire, knife, government corruption, death, road, cruelty, trial, fear, railroaded.

You may think these words are clues in a crossword puzzle, potential answers for a test, or key words inserted on a website to lead people to an article. But what if I told you they were associated with a meaningful story – the story of Jesus' crucifixion.

*Leading up to his crucifixion, Jesus was **railroaded** by a corrupt religious/governmental establish-*

*ment that was determined to destroy him. The Jewish authorities even went so far as to concoct a plan to arrest him at night and force the Roman government to execute him. When the police went out to make the arrest and came face to face with Jesus, the initial realization of who they were encountering caused them to fall away in **fear**. Then one of Jesus' followers pulled out a **knife** and cut off the ear of one of the attending servants. Jesus, however, stopped that from escalating further. The arresting officers then took Jesus to the residence of the Jewish high priest for a show **trial**. All the while, Peter, the one who had cut off the servant's ear, stood beside a nearby **campfire** as he waited for the outcome. Following the encounter with the high priest, Jesus was taken to the residence of Pilate, the Roman governor. There he was exposed to horrendous **cruelty**, and ultimately convicted of a crime. From start to finish, **government corruption** was fully evident - both with the Jews and the Romans. Following the conviction, Jesus was marched down a **road** to be crucified to **death**.*

Before you knew the unifying theme that tied these words together, you could not be sure how they were connected, or what significance might be associated with them. But once the theme was exposed, it all made perfect sense.

This principle is not only true for a story, but is true for every part of life. What affects one part affects them all. Every part of your life is integrally connected to every other part. There are, certainly, diverse elements associated with virtually every aspect of a person's life, but there is also a unifying component that is able to provide context and meaning. Meaning is not

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found in the separate, isolated, individual elements of your life, but rather in the thing that ties all of the pieces together.

The truth is, no ultimate meaning can be discerned from individual parts alone. Without the broader connection, each would be merely detached thoughts or actions floating around in space. If you know the unifying theme, all of the diverse elements associated with it come together in a meaningful way. Without that, all you have are miscellaneous parts that not only prevent one from making sense of it all, but can possibly even be a cause of chaos and destruction.

To more fully illustrate the point, let's apply this principle of a unifying theme to a few common life categories. Below we will look at how this plays out in relationship to our interaction with God, mankind, education, society, the church, and organizational leadership. (Note: There are many more illustrations we could use, but these examples should serve our purpose.)

1. Regarding God [The Arena of Ultimate Existence]

Reality exists in a particular way and does not exist any other way. So what is this existence founded upon? God created it to exist based upon the attributes of His own existence – which combines both unity and diversity. According to the Bible, God exists as a trinitarian person. What this means is that He is a single being, yet exists as three separate centers of consciousness – one God in three persons. The implication is that He exists in a form that is completely unified in His thoughts and will, but also lives in relationship. If the unity portion were set aside, God would be in a position where He could have disputes within Himself. If the diversity did not exist, then the element of

relationship within the godhead would not exist.

2. Regarding Mankind [The Arena of Human Existence]

The way God exists also has profound implications as it relates to the human person. While we are not trinitarian persons as is God, we were created in His image – which makes us spiritual persons. As persons, we are individually separate physical beings with a core essence that is spiritual. At the same time, we are also creatures that are able to self-consciously engage relationships with other persons.

So our diversity is expressed in the fact we are each single individuals among many who exist in the world. Our unity is seen in the fact that we are all self-conscious spiritual persons who are capable of interacting with other persons within meaningful, self-conscious relationships – both human and divine. In that way, the very nature of our existence is based upon the nature of God's existence.

3. Regarding Education [The Arena of the Intellect]

The word "university" expresses the concept of unity in diversity. The diversity element exists in the fact that there are many different fields associated with any given academic institution. In years past, the unity element was achieved by the fact that the various diverse fields were understood through the filter of a single worldview lens. This caused all of the individual fields to view the world through the same set of moral values. When that kind of unity exists in actuality, there is something that ties all of the different fields together.

Without the diversity element, you would be left only with a focus on some random philosophical or religious doctrine with little or no interest in the various other disciplines that exist in the world. If the unity element is set aside and other worldview ex-

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pressions are allowed to exist as interpretive frameworks, the connection between various disciplines necessarily disappears. In that case, each discipline is left to exist without a connection (or perhaps even in opposition) to the others (which is the situation that now exists in most modern educational institutions). In order for the unity element to exist, there must be some absolute moral foundation that is recognized by every discipline. Only a theistic worldview provides this kind of absolute foundation, and only Christian Theism provides it in a way that corresponds to actual reality.

4. Regarding Society [The Arena of Social Interaction]

The concept of unity in diversity also plays out in society. America's national motto is "E Pluribus Unum" – out of many, one. The meaning of this is that there are people from many backgrounds (cultures, ethnicities, races, economic stations, educational backgrounds, etc.) that have been incorporated into a single citizenry and tied together by a single underlying philosophy.

The diversity within American society is a profound strength that allows different demographic groups to express their strengths within the society in ways that benefit all. The unity has traditionally been found in the Judeo-Christian ethic that the nation was founded upon. If the diversity element did not exist, the country would not have ever developed the variety of expressions found in every part of society. If the unity did not exist in the social fabric, then all of the diverse groups that exist in society would be focused only on concerns related to their own group – which inevitably leads to societal conflict.

5. Regarding the Church [The Arena of Human Spiritual Life]

The principle of unity and diversity that we are looking at here can also

easily be applied in various societal communities. Since our purpose here is to apply the principle of unity and diversity to the topic of discipleship training, we are focusing now specifically on the Christian community. Within the church, we also have unity and diversity. This is actually expressed in two different arenas – the very existence of the church itself, and the operation of the church in the world.

The church is described in the New Testament in various ways, but one of the most prominent is "the body of Christ." The unity element within the church comes into play as Christ is its recognized head. It is his will that should be the guide for every part of church life. But as a body, the church is also composed of many parts – each part represented by individual believers with their various spiritual giftings, callings, personalities, and passions. If the unity element were done away with, the various "parts of the body" would not have direction. If the diversity were eliminated, swaths of humanity would be left out of relationship with God, and much of the work God wants to accomplish in the world through believers would not get done. It is this diversity element that requires individual believers to take seriously their personal calling to live as faithful disciples of Christ.

6. Regarding Organizational Leadership [The Arena of Societal Order]

The leadership expression of unity and diversity can also be observed in various arenas of life, but once again our interest here primarily relates to the church – the body of Christ. While the church universal is generally conceived of in more spiritual terms, it also exists in the form of local material institutions in the world. As a physical institution, it has programs, business elements, and spiritual concerns that must all be administered. This administration is almost always

done by specially called and appointed leadership – pastor, ministry staff, deacons, elders, administrative staff, teachers, and so on. The church is a spiritual institution that exists in a material form that must be led by human leaders.

Generally, the pastor is the person who exerts primary leadership within the local institutional church organization (hopefully with he himself being guided by the Holy Spirit who is within him). The particular priorities of any given church are typically based upon the vision and gifting of the pastor. However, the pastor must also be aware of the big picture when exercising his leadership. He is but one member of the body, with his particular personal strengths and gifts – one who is tasked with equipping the rest of the body for ministry. It takes a lot of personal awareness and humility to lead in a way that doesn't crowd out the elements that are outside of his personal gifting and preferences.

The body of Christ exists in two arenas – the being and the doing. The "beingness" is spiritual, and is an expression of its unity. This unity is based on the fact that believers exist as a part of the church because of the personal relationship they have with the head – Jesus Christ. The "doing" element expresses the church's diversity. There are many tasks that are involved in expressing the purpose and will of God in the world, and various believers are called by God to the particular tasks He has in mind for them.

Much of this is expressed in the various programs a particular church might establish. But there are also individuals whose gifts and calling fit outside of those programs – which the leadership must also take into account. A comprehensive expression of discipleship training in a church must embrace both the unity and the diversity in the body. Based on this truth, the particular expressions of that embrace will look very different in the various local assemblies.

Different local churches (and individual pastors) often become known for how they express their own spiritual gifting. Various ones might have a particular focus on evangelism, administration, teaching, social service ministry, devotional life, and other areas. With that in mind, special care must be taken to make sure that the areas that might not be particular strengths of an individual pastor or church, are also somehow accounted for in the church. It is important that the entire church body be able to rally around a leadership vision that is comprehensive – addressing all of the functions of the body of Christ.

Without a unity of vision, there will be constant fights among the members of the body as they each attempt to express their own particular vision. Without the diversity, much of the ministry Christ wants to accomplish through the church will not be performed. While every local assembly will have its own particular way of expressing the unity and diversity that exists within the body, both the unity and diversity must be present – every part of it.

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