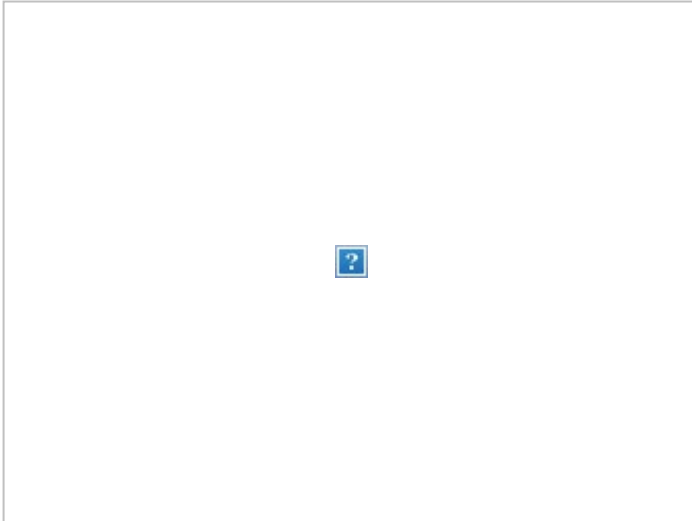


From: [Tony Webb](#)
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Subject: How to Practice Virtual Discipleship
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Discipling Opportunities: Virtual Discipleship

Even in tragedy, God opens the door to opportunities! With social distancing to battle this coronavirus, we are able to explore other disciple making venues with our 'normal' ones blocked (for the time being). In our Vision USA network, our primary method of discipleship with our key leaders is virtual or digital discipleship. This 'virtual discipleship' uses two tools: any video platform you have access to and the phone.

Naturally, I have learned many lessons over the years of using these tools. These conversations range from individuals to teams (anywhere from 3-20 people in the local church/denominational context). I normally use the word 'coaching' to describe it, but in reality, it is a powerful form of discipleship-perhaps the most powerful form! The discipleship outcome is expressed by the processed next steps on their discipling topic and reported fruit from their activity. Our goal is "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (ICF Definition of Coaching). We use question asking and careful listening to advance this process.

This continues to prove itself as the best way for us to move ahead in our VUSA network given both the geographic breadth of our network and the desired discipleship fruit. I hope these lessons can help open you up to new possibilities in the way you conduct your ministry as well as bring some encouragement in this time. Despite the challenges of the present 'new thinking' day, this form of discipleship presents itself with great power and opportunity. After 1500 hours in the last few years using zoom video and phone calls, I see the primary benefits of virtual discipleship to be:

1. Engaging in some Jesus-like activity.

Jesus' question asking process means I use less content or lesson-based material.

Anything that is delivered in a 'one voice' environment. The 'one voice' being my voice etc. Martin Copenhaver, in his book *Jesus is the Question*, shares this: "In the four Gospels Jesus asks 307 different questions. By contrast, he is only asked 183 questions. . . Two published studies state that Jesus directly answers only 3 of 183 questions he is asked. According to my count, Jesus directly answers as many as 8 of the question he is asked. . ." (Page xviii).

The pointed question very simply is this: How did the Master Disciple - Jesus - disciple those around Him?

Did he use content mostly? Or did he use questions mostly? You must answer this question carefully and clearly.

Another key question to discipling is this: What role am I allowing for the Holy Spirit in His work?

While I was trained to disciple via content and there is an advantage to using it, this is certainly a case of "less is more" and a significantly greater advantage is gained in asking questions versus using content.

This applies to either face to face or virtual environments, but the outcome remains the same. I find virtual environments lend themselves to questions quite well.

2. This is incredibly simple.

The process of asking questions and listening is very simple in both a virtual and face to face environment once you learn how to do it well. For some of us, myself included, it is a big shift in how we are 'trained' to disciple people. This simple approach brings great dividends. The biggest challenge is in recognizing the need and deciding to make an effort to apply this approach.

3. This is a powerful way to discover the 'intrinsic motivation' button.

When I am discipling anyone, I have one major goal: finding their 'intrinsic motivation' button. When I am able to help someone become intrinsically motivated to relate to and seek Jesus Christ, then NOTHING can stop them-nothing. So often our discipling work only hopes to find this intrinsic motivation through the content we share. Coaching/discipling virtually helps bring this focus as primary because both you and your disciplee are there together for either this specific reason or one very near it. If they are there for a reason near this, it is not difficult for you to help move it there.

4. This is incredibly effective and focused.

Virtual discipleship does have a different feel. It may take some time to get used to, but this is one of the reasons it is so effective. The intentionality of the engagement makes the discipling fruit quite powerful.

5. The fruit is powerful, and the next steps are simple.

Virtual places like Zoom, Skype, or the phone allow easily for clear and continued

conversation. I actually find face to face to be very distracting - or at least I have more distractions to overcome. The amount of sensory stimulation like fidgeting, adjusting, or even pausing to think that resonates off someone in person is vastly more overpowering than it is via a virtual environment.

6. This is a powerful discipline for me:

The question asking, listening, recording what is said - are all powerful. Through the simplicity of all this, it is a powerful tool to movement ahead.

7. It has few limits and allows us to go all over the country and the world.

The local church is to impact their Jeruselems, Judeas, Samarias and their uttermost places in the world. Unfortunately, we change how we view discipleship based on which of the four we are looking at. I see this as regrettable and distracting. I am not talking about a 'one size fits all' concept but a matter of that which is most effective. If it is effective in the uttermost parts, would it not be effective in Jerusalem?

Discipleship happens in its most healthy applications within the context of the local church and all church means. Let's continue to figure out all the ways available to us to disciple in the most valuable ways possible.

What other discipling tools can you add to your toolbox? I hope 'virtual' is one of them.

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