

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

Spiritual Objectivity: A Tier Level Approach to Assessing Spiritual Maturity and Leadership

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Spirituality is at the core of being a disciple of Jesus, but what is spirituality and what makes for a spiritual person? What does Christian spirituality look like in the expediting of the life in Christ? It is quite incumbent upon a disciple to understand this. This idea of spirituality is also an existential issue with respect to all of humanity: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”¹ To ignore this spiritual reality, and assume we are just a hunk of flesh, moves one into nihilism and tragic consequences.² To *not* live spiritually would then default to living worldly, and the final outcomes with this experience of life are quite a contrast (Mal. 3:18).

Christian spirituality can be robust in the contemporary world offering a “lived faith and academic discipline that is globally conscious and universally aligned” and thus “a credible contextual rationale for our times.”³ It can speak cogently to a culture needing to know how to live. Thus, “Christian spirituality...becomes an encompassing field of that world that ‘God loved so much.’”⁴ The presenting of a Christian spirituality has a credible place in the

¹ A quote attributed to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a French philosopher. jesuitresource.org.

² Nietzsche touted nihilism and provided intellectual fuel for some of the greatest despots in history. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann, ed. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1968. For the atheistic Marxist who essentially has believed that man is just a hunk of flesh (no spiritual reality), the results have been catastrophic—the murder of around 139 million people in the 20th and 21st century. Ideas have consequences, and the failure to believe in a spiritual dimension has led to the diabolic—man’s inhumanity to man.

³ C. Kourie & T. Ruthenberg, “Contemporary Christian Spirituality: An ‘Encompassing Field,’” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 11: 76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

marketplace of ideas for the souls of men, but in the words of Elton Trueblood, “we must meticulously avoid reference to a vague spirituality” (cf., Acts 17:16-34).⁵

The New Testament delineates between a mature and immature spirituality. It is apparent that the motivation behind so many Christian ministries and books (perhaps the impetus behind every Christian book) is to encourage disciples into spiritual maturity in some manner.⁶

Scripture encourages this development in the lives of disciples (Heb. 5:11-6:3). Compelled into this spiritual way of life and emerging into spiritual maturity is axiomatic to faith in Christ Jesus (Mt. 5:48). We are on a progressive journey upward.

Spirituality and Leadership

Spirituality permeates the life of everything in the church (vs. legalism, sectarianism, materialism); the spirit of worldliness permeates everything in the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17.) It has implications in every aspect of how a church must function. It is the test of the true and authentic Church of Christ on this earth—“by their fruits you shall know them” (Mt. 7:15-23). This is no more so true than with leadership. That is why a high bar is set for those who would take on leadership in the church (1Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Healthy churches tend to have healthy leaders; unhealthy churches tend to have unhealthy leaders.

Assessing the emotional/spiritual health of a leader is imperative for the growth of not only that leader, but those he interacts with within the fellowship. Richardson states: “The functioning of important leaders can be so tied into the church emotional system that their ability

⁵ Elton Trueblood, *A Place to Stand* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 127.

⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996); James Merritt, *Character Still Counts*. Eugene: Harvest House, 2019; Tony Merida, *Love Your Church* (London: The Good Book Company, 2021); Craig Groeschel, *Divine Direction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); and for the secular world, Joran Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Great Britain: Penguin Random House UK, 2018).

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

to manage their own lives becomes impaired as anxiety increases in the system.”⁷ The leader affects the system, but the system in turn affects the leader.⁸ This is fundamental human reality: everything affects everything within a context.⁹

SPIRITUALITY, LEADERSHIP AND A TIER LEVEL APPROACH

It is the thesis of this paper that delineating spirituality with respect to leadership and the subsequent effects upon the fellowship utilizing a Tier Level approach can be of immense help for those seeking to grow in their spirituality. This writer offers an approach that may be helpful in encouraging a personal vision toward spirituality for all disciples, but especially leadership.¹⁰ The delineation with this approach may allow for a concrete assessment of how an individual functions spiritually vs. working with vague or blurred lines in one’s assessment of self. It moves one to assess one’s spiritual life more accurately and soberly (Rom. 12:3). The core of this Tier Level approach involves spiritual objectivity vs. subjectivity. Spiritual *objectivity* allows a disciple to discern everything from an objective standpoint gathering facts and utilizing theology, and thus being effective in a given situation. *Subjectivity* causes a person to fixate emotionally on a person, situation, or predicament and thus be ineffective in understanding, interpreting and working with a given situation. This kind of subject matter is not foreign to the drive of many in the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality who call for “a solution to the vagueness

⁷ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 140.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 131-41.

⁹ Richard M. Lerner, *Concepts and Theories of Human Development*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰ It is only a tool, not to replace biblical terminology, but provide a grasp on delineating biblical idea/terminology with respect to spiritual maturity vs. immaturity.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

inherent in ...defining ‘spirituality’ ” and challenges the church to engage this issue “both sympathetically and critically.”¹¹ This could also involve “understanding [of] how people conceive of spirituality” which from a biblical standpoint may be misguided or diluted.¹² A value to this Tier Level approach: people find it easier to assess where they truly are at as disciples and to see a concrete trajectory for growth. While the terminology of mature vs. immature is valid and helpful, this approach may provide a perspective that could sharpen this effort of self-realization. This approach may be more palatable and effective in challenging the immature disciple to higher ground. The Tiers in this writer’s approach are as follow in brief:

Tier 1 individuals are depraved, worldly and carnal minded (2 Tim. 3:1-4, 13). They have not been altered by an encounter with Jesus but are still dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1). This kind of person looks at people, situations and life experiences in a worldly way. Tier 1 people can certainly exist in the church—the “wheat and the weeds” growing together until the harvest (Mt. 13:24-30). Delineating this Tier is important for safety and spiritual well-being of those in the body of Christ. A **Tier 2** person has been converted to Christ and is in the process of sanctification. They struggle to shed worldly habits, attitudes and approaches. They tend to be highly subjective in interpreting people and situations, and working through challenges. They are spiritually immature and have much to learn. They are essentially a mix bag of some spirituality and some worldliness. A **Tier 3** person is spiritually mature. He/she has the ability to be fair-minded, rational and logical and bring theological and spiritual perspectives into every

¹¹ Christo Lombaard, “First Steps into the Discipline: On the ‘Spirit’ in the Discipline of Christian Spirituality.” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75 (1), 8.

¹² Carlos Santos & Jay L. Michaels, “What are the Core Features and Dimensions of ‘Spirituality’? Applying a Partial Prototype Analysis to Understand How Laypeople Mentally Represent Spirituality as a Concept.” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 14(1), 11.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

assessment of people and situations of life. **Tier 4** is completely exclusive—only Jesus is on that level. He is perfect, flawless and impeccable in His spiritual discernment of people and situations. We see this in every encounter He had in life. His demonstrated complete spiritual objectivity. He is beyond us in every way, but gives us the perpetual example to follow. The words of the late Arlie Hoover are germane here: “Jesus Christ pushed every good quality of human character to its utmost limit. We can never go beyond him; he will always be in front of us, beckoning to us, ‘Follow me.’”¹³

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Definition of Spirituality

Perhaps the clearest definition of spirituality comes from Scripture itself. People who are spiritual can evaluate life, people and situations from a spiritual perspective with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:15-16). They yield to the Holy Spirit’s influence upon their life (Gal. 5:16-25). Spirituality is “the state of deep relationship to God.”¹⁴ It certainly could be concluded: if one is *not* in a deep relationship with God, one is *not* spiritual? Friendship with God seems to be at the core of spirituality. In contradistinction, friendship with the world is hostility with God (Jam. 4:4). Abraham was a “friend” of God (Jam. 2:23). Jesus moves the relationship with His disciples to a level of friendship (Jn. 15:14-15), and those who connected with Him were affected in the most substantial way from being worldly to becoming spiritual (Mt. 10:24-25; Jn. 15:18-21). Thus, spirituality is more about a connection with God, a relationship that is transformational. “Spirituality is not a formula; it is not a test. It is a relationship. Spirituality is

¹³ Arlie Hoover, *Dear Agnos: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand rapids: Baker, 1976), 204.

¹⁴ J. M. Houston, “Spirituality.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1138.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

not about competency; it is about intimacy. Spirituality is not about perfection; it is about connection.”¹⁵ Jesus is the example of spirituality. We are being conformed into His image (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:16-18). In this world we are to be like Jesus, exuding a spirituality of His kind (1 Jn. 2:6; 4:17). His death on the cross/atonement instilled in us a “spiritual vitality and direction into our lives”¹⁶ so we could become the kind of human being we were intended to be. Thus, spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, Scriptural study, meditation, solitude are about building the relationship/friendship with God, and “spiritual practices are those actions entered into for the purpose of deepening awareness of and responses to God.”¹⁷

Leadership and Spirituality

Leadership in the Kingdom involves a modeling of mature spirituality (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Th. 1:6; Heb. 13:7). Leaders themselves have reached spiritual levels of functioning and thus impact those they have connection with in the body (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9), so much so, “they smell like sheep.”¹⁸ Scripture delineates much of this spirituality in the passages on appointing elders and deacons, but it is not exhaustive in its criteria. There is much more that must be realized in attaining a spiritual influence among God’s people. It involves a wonderful spiritual objectivity that is effective in dealing with God’s people. This writer has synthesized/systematized from Scripture (particularly the New Testament), a delineation of spirituality with a Tier Level (I, II, III, IV) approach that is germane to leadership.

¹⁵ Michael Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 22.

¹⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 715.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Liebert, “Theology and Spirituality: Pondering Anew Their Complex Interrelationship.” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 22(1), 42.

¹⁸ Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep: Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing, 1997), 4.

SCRIPTURAL DELINEATION OF THE TIER LEVELS

Tier 1

A Tier 1 person is *not* in the Kingdom, but they may dwell among people in the Kingdom —“weeds among the wheat” (Mt. 13:24-30). Perhaps they have a “form of religion” but have no genuine spiritual life (2 Tim. 3:5). A challenging reality among God’s people are false prophets who are “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*” (Mt. 7:15). Tier 1 people have not been truly converted, regenerated or born again. They are “dead in their transgressions and sins” and follow “the ways of this world” (Eph. 3:1-3). They love the world and the things of the world (Jam. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17), are caught up in the “rat race” of life (Mt. 6:32), and pursue a myriad of idolatries (Mt. 6:24; 1 Cor. 12:2; cf. 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Th. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:21). They view people and situations from a worldly perspective (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16-17), use and take advantage of vulnerable people, especially in a financial and/or sexual way (2 Tim. 3:6), and do not engage God in meaningful connectivity (Lk. 18:9-14). They are ultimately controlled by the flesh (Rom. 8.8), and do not really know God (Mt. 25:41-46; Lk. 13:22-30; 1 Cor. 15.34; 2 Tim. 3:5, 7; 1 Jn. 2:4). They may have a personality disorder (a staggering 12-15 percent of the general population), which demonstrates an inability to function healthily among people, and will certainly have maladaptive traits that are resistant to change. Those with a personality disorder as an unconverted human being will be

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

closed to the work of the Holy Spirit to transform their lives (Ac. 7:51; Rom. 11:7).¹⁹ In addition, they perpetually deal with the stresses of life and negative emotions (e.g., anger, insecurity, hate, emptiness) through defense mechanisms (this may also be true with Tier 2 people).²⁰ There are many other passages of Scripture that depict a Tier 1 person.²¹

Tier 2

A Tier 2 person is a disciple of Christ who has not attained spiritual maturity. The twelve apostles were Tier 2 in so many ways during their three years of discipleship with Jesus. They would certainly emerge into a Tier 3 spiritual maturity (which will be explained shortly). Tier 2 disciples have some spiritual traits, but continue to traffic in worldly or unspiritual patterns. They may know about God, but not actually know Him (1 Cor. 15:34; cf. Jn. 3:10), be active in church, pray a lot, study the Bible, reach out to people to win them to Christ (Phil. 1:15-17), but display significant spiritual immaturity such as envy, selfish ambition, and quarreling with others (1 Cor. 3:3).

The Tier 2 disciple has an adversarial mindset in relationships, tends to quarrel, traffics in pettiness, and is bothered by people's idiosyncrasies (1 Cor. 3:1ff.; 2 Cor. 12:20; Phil. 4:2-3; Jam. 4:1-2; cf. 1 Tim. 3:3; 6:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:24). He/she usually has a *me-against-you* or *us-against-*

¹⁹ American Psychiatric Association (APA). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th Edition (Arlington, Virginia: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 645-684. The DSM-V specifically reveals and delineates in great detail the fallenness and depravity of humanity.

²⁰ American Psychiatric Association (APA). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th Edition-TR (Arlington, Virginia: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 808-09.

²¹ Mt. 6:32; Rom. 1:21-32; 13:13-14; 1 Cor. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:1ff; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 2:3; 4:17-19; Tim. 3:1-9; Tit. 1:15, 16; 3:3.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

them approach in relationships (our tribe against your tribe) (Mk. 9:38-41; Tit. 3:9-11). Thus, he struggles to be a peace with people in the fellowship, and with those outside the fellowship (e.g., family, job).

There is always the danger of a new convert having pride, especially if given the responsibility of leadership (1 Tim. 3:6). This issue of pride was ever the challenge for Jesus' disciples (Lk. 9:46-48). Pride is a real temptation for the insecure person. If the Tier 2 disciple is insecure, the almost irresistible pull is into a religious pride that seems to pump the person up in an artificial way among others. The Tier 2 disciple finds religion, church, and ministry an avenue to substantiate his/her life in the eyes of others, albeit conducting ministry with a spirit of pride. This will surely lead to the disciple's downfall in some manner, for "pride goes before destruction" (Pr. 16:18 NIV).

The flesh may be a significant challenge for the Tier 2 disciple. There is this ubiquitous struggle with conquering the pull of the flesh to sin (Rom. 7:7-25; cf. Gal. 5:15). The Tier 2 disciple may be too "turned-on" by the beauty of other's flesh **or** too "turned-off" by the grossness of other's flesh, but he tends to assess people from a worldly/fleshly standpoint (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16-17). Sexual struggles are usually the case with a Tier 2 disciple (1 Cor. 7:9; cf. Rom. 7:5).

The bane of humanity is comparison: Satan compared himself to God; Cain compared himself to Able (Gen. 4:1ff); village compared itself to village. Tier 2 disciples have the tendency to compare themselves to others. It usually emerges out of insecurity and/or covetousness (Ex. 20:17). Comparison is spiritually toxic—it is the "thief" or "death of joy."²² It is an unspiritual

²² "Comparison is the thief of joy" is attributed to Theodore Roosevelt. "Comparison is the death of joy" is attributed to an unknown professor.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

behavior and Christians are not to compare themselves to others (Mt. 20:1-16; 2 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 1:10; 6:4; Phil. 2:3). It cultivates jealousy and an unhealthy interfacing with others (1 Cor. 3:3). A Tier 2 disciple must learn the value in assessing people (vs. comparing), which is nourishing to the soul (Jn. 3:29). This comes in the following positive ways of interfacing with others: being inspired by another; learning from others; loving and praying for a person (instead of being competitive); serving, enjoying, and encouraging others.

Without a connection with God, people tend toward insecurity, and this insecurity drives pride, which amounts to the presenting of a false self. It ultimately manifests itself in feelings of *inferiority* or *superiority* in the presence of others.

A Tier 2 disciple may be aggressive, passive-aggressive or passive-compliant because he/she has not yet learned the interpersonal relationship skill of assertiveness.²³ Assertiveness is a learned interpersonal relationship skill that allows a disciple to be optimally effective in his/her interactions with others. Jesus was impeccable assertive in every encounter with people (mild, moderate or passionate assertiveness). He is our example on how to live in the most effective way and assertiveness is one of those skills that a Tier 2 has not quite learned, but a Tier 3 disciple has mastered.²⁴

The Tier 2 disciple may be quick to condemn certain people they may not like or agree with, selective with extending grace, and struggles to forgive those who have been offensive to them. Holding grudges may be something the Tier 2 disciple feels for long periods of time, if not indefinitely (Rom. 12:19).

²³ This writer has found this so true through testing hundreds of Christians in the church with the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis.

²⁴ Please see F. Alan Pickering, *Assert Yourself* www.ultimatelifenow.org.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

The Tier 2 disciple is gradually growing but may be resistance to the Holy Spirit's influence upon his/her life in various areas of living the best and most effective life in Christ (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:30; 1 Th. 5:19). For instance, the Tier 2 may feel justified in talking badly about others, but resists moving on to the impeccable level of a Tier 3 disciple who does not speak badly about anyone (1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 3:2). He may resist being kind, nice or talking to those he dislikes—being selective with his spirituality.

The Tier 2 disciple may have significant struggles with handling his emotions—anger, moodiness, irritability, easily discouraged, anxiety issues.²⁵ The Tier 2 disciple must habituate emotional regulation by yielding to the influence of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and doing major cognitive work (Rom. 12:2). Unfortunately, many Tier 2 disciples (perhaps as 12-15% of the fellowship, which is commensurate with the general population) may be so horrible affected by their upbringing or the world that they have developed a personality disorder, which if not seriously dealt with, will plague this disciple their entire life, which will result in an ineffectiveness, if not, a destructiveness in the Kingdom.²⁶

It seems to this writer that most in the church spend years living as a Tier 2 disciple, and thus are *not* significantly effective. This writer, in retrospect, lived many decades as a Tier 2 disciple, much to my regret and chagrin. Most Tier 2 disciples are a blend of modest spirituality and mild or significant worldliness, and thus are “lukewarm” (Rev. 3:15-16). Jesus was often exasperated with His disciples: “Do you not yet understand?” “How long must I be with you!”

²⁵ This may come from the perpetual habit of utilizing defense mechanisms to deal with negative emotions (e.g., anger, insecurity, anxiety, fear). It may also have been cultivated through the overuse of the amygdala through growing up under great stress in human connectivity with parents, siblings, or peers. The use of the rational brain/prefrontal cortex in the challenges of human connection may have never been developed.

²⁶ This writer has helped dozens of disciples come out of a personality disorder, but not without first identifying the disorder, and then spending years working to make the necessary changes to becoming a healthy person.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

(Mt. 16:8-12; Mk. 8:21; 9:19). What is so amazing was His ability to patiently work with His disciple to bring them to a spiritual maturity. Thank God we live in grace, under the tutelage of a wonderful “coach,” and thus are able to continue to grow and become a better “ball player” in the Kingdom of God.

The Tier 2 disciple has *yet* to become significantly secure, objective, and established in spirituality. They are still immature in varying degrees and ways, but are growing usually growing in the Spirit, crucifying the flesh, and eliminating sinful habits (Rom. 7-8; Gal. 5:16-26). They are established in the grace of God while journeying down the narrow path of life (Mt. 7:13-14), but may sin “so that grace may increase” (Rom. 6:1 NIV). There are many crucial challenges for the Tier 2 disciple to meet. He must find and follow a mentor who will challenge him to grow to spiritual maturity; identify and repent of sinful behaviors, yield in greater earnestness to the Holy Spirit’s influence; do daily cognitive work of integrating God’s ideas into his/her thinking (Ps. 119:97; Rom. 12.1-2; Eph. 4:23). It is imperative for the Tier 2 disciple to realize two major truths with respect to growth: *first*, you cannot change what you do not identify; *second*, to the degree you are willing to be specific will be to the degree of your growth.

There are many Scriptures depicting a Tier 2 type of disciple.²⁷ I encourage you to make a list of the Tier 2 behaviors you tend to traffic in, and then to daily renounce these unspiritual characteristics.

²⁷ Mt. 5:19; Mk. 9:38; 10:13-14, 17-22, 35-46; Lk. 6:41-42; Rom. 14:10, 13, 20; 1 Cor. 1:11-12; 3:1ff.; 4:6, 10-13, 20; 9:6; 11:17-19; “Do not be like children in your thinking...” 1 Cor. 14:20 TEV; 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Cor. 12:20-21; Gal. 5:26; 1 Tim. 1:4; 3:6; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 22-24; Ti. 3:9-11; Jam. 3:14-16; 4:11-12; 5:9; 2 Pet. 2:3; 3 Jn. 9-11; Jude 4,16, 19; Rev. 3:15-16

Tier 3

The Tier 3 disciple is spiritually mature. He has grown to a level of influence and effectiveness with his life. He actually can say, “For to me, living means living is Christ” (Phil. 1:21, NLT), which involves being “bold for Christ” and brings “honor to Christ” (Phil. 1:20, NLT). The Tier 3 disciple is “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16) and let’s his “light shine before men” (Mt. 5:14-16). He lives a radiant and glorious life (Lk. 11:36; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; cf. Ps. 34:5 NLT; Pr. 10:11 NLT). His life in Christ makes the teaching about God appealing or attractive (Tit. 2:10).

A Tier 3 disciple has rejected the world’s lifestyle (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Jn. 2:15-17); repented of his sinful way of life (Acts 2:38; Eph. 5: 3-14); and is living in the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:5). With respect to spirituality, the Tier 3 disciple has no time for the superficial; he only has time for that which is substantive and profound. He has moved out of legalism and superficial religion (Mt. 6:7 “don’t be like them”). He overcome evils with good (Rom. 12:21). He experiences growth through his suffering (Jam. 1:2-4), does not complain (Phil. 2:14-16) and is content with life (Phil. 4:11-13). He feels the power of God working in him (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:29).

The Tier 3 disciple realizes he is saved completely through grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Given this reality of his own good fortune, he extends grace to others (Rom. 12:3; 1 Pet. 1:2). Out of his own liberation from the bonds of sins, he freely forgives others (Mt. 6:14-18; 18:21-35). From a perspective with Jesus on the cross (Gal. 2:20), he can say, “Father, forgive them—they know

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

not what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34, NIV). As Martin Luther King, Jr. observed, “He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.”²⁸

The Tier 3 disciple notices the immaturities, sinfulness, improprieties of those in the Kingdom—the Tier 2 disciples (e.g., gossip, slandering, judgments), but is patient with such “brethren”/family members encouraging them to grow up in Christ—“If our faith is strong, we should be patient with the Lord’s followers whose faith is weak” (Rom. 15:1, CEV) (Cf. Eph. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 1 Thess. 5:14 “be patient with everyone”; 1 Pet. 2:2). Those on a Tier 3 level will notice this low-spirituality and will respond in an appropriate manner (2 Tim. 4:2). The Tier 3 disciple’s “faith is strong” and thus he is “patient with the Lord’s followers whose faith is weak (Rom. 15:1 CEV). He feels the onus of helping Tier 2 disciples to see what they must surely see and thus become what they must surely become in Christ (Gal. 4:19).

The Tier 3 disciple stands for truth—“Our responsibility is never to oppose the truth, but to stand for the truth at all times” (2 Cor, 13:8, NLT). He is to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). He has become significantly secure through his connection with God and thus is assertive with other disciples in the Kingdom in *every* encounter (e.g., a mild, moderate, or passionate assertiveness).²⁹ He able to connect with anyone, irrespective of a person’s wealth, education, socio-economic status, looks, etc. and is not intimidated by anyone but able to be Christ to everyone. The *best-converted-him* shows up in human connectivity because he is the disciple of the best life ever lived in human history, and has grown significantly as His disciple.

²⁸ www.goodreads.com

²⁹ F. Alan Pickering, *Assert Yourself: Be Firm, Stand Up for Yourself, Be a Good Steward of Your Life* (Dallas: Ultimate Life, 2020), 25-26. See a thorough treatment on assertiveness through this work.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

He accurately assesses the flaws, depravity, personality disorders of people through the “mind of Christ”—his thinking is in harmony with Jesus’ teachings (1 Cor. 2:16). He is not bothered by a person’s idiosyncrasies; he is informed—behavior is a window to the soul. He is inclusive with all believers, for he realizes the Kingdom is broad (Mt. 22:1-14; 28:18-20 “all” *ta ethne*; Rev. 7:9). Thus, he encourages all and condemns none, a genuine servant, helping fellow sojourners up the mountain of life. He hates sin and evil, just like God and never ignores the “cancer” or deception present in any person’s life (Pr. 8:13; Mt. 16:23; Jn. 4:17-18).

The Sermon on the Mount essentially challenges a disciple to be holy—“noticeably different”³⁰ from those who function in a shallow, legalistic or worldly way (Mt. 6:7). He is gripped by the challenge to be like God in holiness (2 Cor. 1:12; Eph. 5:1; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:15). He senses the transformational effect in reflecting the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). He is dedicated to a connection with God through prayer (Mt. 7:7-8; Col. 4:2), in which he finds his encouragement and strength (Ps. 138:3). In this vein of being noticeably different, a Tier 3 disciple is non-judgmental (Mt. 7:1-5); has discernment in sharing truth with people (Mt. 7:6); but is able to sniff out the danger of a false prophet (Mt. 7:15-23).

He anticipates God working through him (Eph. 2:10), and is a disciple-making disciple (Mt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2).³¹ He is perpetually learning and growing in the faith; he realizes that he will never arrive, because he is on a journey of growth (Jn. 15:1-8; Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:10; 2

³⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, Rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2020), 2. A phrase utilize by a Landon Pickering sermon based on Stott’s perspective and William Barclay.

³¹ Christopher Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples: A Practical Theology of the Church* (Franklin, Tennessee: Carpenter’s Son Publishing, 2021).

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

Pet. 3:18); and he realizes there is no growth apart from community (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:14-16).³²

A Tier 3 disciple lives in the delightful state of theological reality in Christ. His “roots grow deep into Him,” and his life is “built on Him” (Col. 2:7, NLT). He is always “eager to learn more” (Pr. 15:14 CEV); to learn about the Creator to become like Him (Eph. 5:1; Col. 3:10, NLT). His life essentially moves in one significant direction in the reality of this faith—deeper (Eph. 3:18; Phil. 1:9).

The Tier 3 disciple avoids silly and inane conversation (Eph. 5:4; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 23; cf. 4:7), as well as foolish, ignorant, and worthless conversations (2 Tim. 2:16, 23; Tit. 3:9). He is “grown up in [his] your thinking” (1 Cor. 14:20, TEV).

He eschews gossip and never slanders because of a sense that every person is made in the image of God and therefore precious (Gen. 1:27; Eph. 4:31). No “unwholesome word” proceeds from his mouth, but “only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29, NASB). What first emerges out of your mouth is usually an indicator of which level you are at with respect to this Tier Level assessment (Jam. 3:1-12). “Authentic faith leads us to treat others with unconditional seriousness and to a loving reverence for the mystery of human personality.”³³ Upon seeing another human being, the Tier 3 disciple declares, “Here is a precious person made in the image of God.” As Brennan Manning put it: “The way we are with each other is the truest test of our faith.”

³² Karl Barth, “The Growth of the Community” in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, Ray S. Anderson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 258-301.

³³ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (New York: Multnomah, 2005), 139.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

Rather than judging where the person is at in their walk with God, the Tier 3 disciple helps a person get to higher ground in his/her walk with God. The disposition of being poor in spirit allows him to connect and “get along with sinners.”³⁴

A Tier 3 disciples believes in the essential connection of a believer with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Heb. 10:24-25). As Cyprian observed in 251 A.D., “No one can have God for Father, who has not the church for mother.”³⁵ Thus, he is insistent that anyone who claims a relationship with Christ must connect with his body and experience meaningful community. Life is better when done with others. Growing emotionally and spiritually will depend not just in a connection with God but with others who can be of encouragement and guidance.³⁶ In addition, the Tier 3 disciple is an instrument to cultivate unity among believers vs. discord. Sadly, Tier 2 disciples cultivate disunity through their immaturity (2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Tit. 3:9-11). Erickson has an excellent treatment on the unity of the church from a theological perspective.³⁷

In his connection with others, the Tier 3 disciple makes “every effort to live in peace with all men” (Heb. 12:14, NIV); speaks carefully and respectfully to others (1 Tim. 5:1); is kind and patient with everyone, especially with “difficult people” (2 Tim. 2.24). He sees the potential of Christ in people: “So then, from now on, we have a new perspective that refuses to evaluate people merely by their outward appearance” (2 Cor. 5:16, *The Passion Translation*, 2018); and then, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor.

³⁴ Ibid, 81.

³⁵ *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, ch. vi.

³⁶ Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2005); .

³⁷ Erickson, 1008-1115.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

5:17, NIV). This is true of the world: “There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.”³⁸ But this is not so with Tier 3 disciples in the Kingdom of God.

A Tier 3 disciple is stable emotionally, therefore he is not worry or anxious about people or predicaments or potential things (Mt. 5:25-34; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:7). His complete trust is in God who will handle people and situations (Pr. 3:5-6; Isa. 26:3; Rom. 8:28).

It is interesting to realize that Jesus was never offended—He was so anchored and balanced in the reality of His Being, that He could never be shaken. The Pharisees were perpetually offended by Jesus (impeccably Tier 4) because, they were in fact at best, Tier 2. “When a man or woman is truly honest (not just working at it) it is virtually impossible to insult them personally. There is nothing there to insult.”³⁹ The Tier 3 disciple is unoffendable.⁴⁰ It becomes irrelevant who people are to him; what’s relevant is, who is he to people.

There are perhaps a hundred categories depicting the inexhaustible life of Christ (Jn. 20:30-31).⁴¹ The Tier 3 disciple emulates and grows into *any* and *every* way that could amount to the maximizing of his life to be effective and bring glory to Christ. The following five categories represent a few significant aspect of a Tier 3 disciple, but there are numerous categories that could be highlighted.

³⁸ Attributed to Robert M. Hensel. Quotefancy.com

³⁹ Manning, 86.

⁴⁰ Brant Hansen, *Unoffendable: How Just One Change Can Make All of Life Better* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2015).

⁴¹ This writer recommends such excellent assessments of Jesus life: Charles E. Jefferson, *The Character of Jesus* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1936); Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Genius of Jesus: The Man Who Changed Everything* (New York: Convergent, 2021); James Stalker, *The Example of Jesus (Imago Christi)* (New Canaan, Connecticut: Keats Publishing, 1980); William Barclay, *Jesus as They Saw Him* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962); John R. W. Stott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2001).

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

A Man of Peace

The Tier 3 disciple lives in peace with others (Mk. 9:50; Rom. 12:18; 14:19). He is not a brawler, contentious, a quarreler; he is a peacemaker—he works for peace, under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and as such demonstrates a deep connection with God as one of His children (Mt. 5:9). Men of the world and Tier 2 disciples cultivate disharmony, estrangements, and rivalries (me vs. you; us vs. them). This goes hand in hand with not being violent but gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). This effort of cultivating peace raises a “harvest of righteousness” (Jam. 3:18, NIV). There is an intentional labor/”work” of living in peace with everyone (Heb. 12:14). The onus is on him—“as it depends upon you” (Rom. 12:18). Rather than being at odds with people, “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people” (2 Tim. 2:24, NLT). His work with people is proactive: “And I will give you shepherds after my heart, who will guide you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15, NLT).

Character

Character is who you are when no one is looking. For instance, if a disciple (probably Tier 2) is looking at pornography in private, but embarrassed if anyone found out (see Num. 32:23; Pr. 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:24-25), he/she is not displaying character. Character is related to spirituality, because one could not claim to be spiritual if he/she is significantly flawed in character. Swindoll encourages an active spirituality rooted in the character of the disciple—a spirituality in action that is quite comprehensive: alertness, appreciation, compassion, confidentiality, consistency, cooperativeness, courtesy, discernment, discipline, efficiency, enthusiasm, flexibility, gentleness, honesty, creativity, dependability, humility, initiative, love,

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

loyalty, objectivity, patience, peacefulness, punctuality, self-control, sincerity, submissiveness, tactfulness, teachability, thoroughness, tolerance, sense of humor, sensitivity, understanding, unselfishness.⁴² He goes on in his book to delineate in detail a spirituality that involves obedience, depth, serenity, a sensitive heart, biblical knowledge, friendly counsel, a controlled tongue, contentment, resisting temptation, diligence, submission to sovereignty, industriousness, balance, acceptance, forgiveness, affirmation, tolerance, taking responsibility, financial accountability, pleasing God, and wisdom.⁴³ Quite a list! Why? Character is who a person is, which then affects every aspect of a person's being. How could one possibly attain to this level of impeccability? The Tier 3 disciple is radically changed from *within*, which then affects everything *without* (Mt. 12:34; 15:18-20). He is changed/converted into a different human being by an encounter with the greatest life ever lived in human history.

Theology, Spirituality and Objectivity

The Tier 3 disciple utilizes theology in all that he does in the expediting of his life (Mt. 4:4). The questions of life are rooted theologically and theology is the question of life.⁴⁴ Theological perspectives inform the Tier 3 disciple how to interpret and work with life, and it informs his spirituality.⁴⁵ The stronger and more accurate your theology, the better your ability to deal with life; the weaker your theology, the weaker will be your ability to work with life. In being objective (a foundational characteristic of a Tier 3 disciple), the individual sees the big picture (objectivity), and thus is able to discern very accurately in any given situation. We see

⁴² Charles R. Swindoll. *Active Spirituality*. (Dallas: Word, 1994), 15.

⁴³ Ibid, 18-188.

⁴⁴ Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019), 5.

⁴⁵ Liebert, 42.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

this perceptive ability in Jesus (e.g., Mk. 12:13-17). Rather than quick and inaccurate perceptions based on subjectivity, the Tier 3 disciple is objective bringing in the facts along with theological commentary. Liebert sees the importance of “theological reflection regarding beliefs undergirding the spiritual journey of Christians” and its effect in bolstering a robust spirituality.⁴⁶ She advocates assessing the spiritual journey (and in our case a Tier Level approach) “...in a similar manner to disciplines such as medicine and psychology, where theoretical studies advance knowledge at the same time that there is an expectation that such advancement of knowledge will serve a practical purpose.”⁴⁷

Love—The Core of a Spiritual Life and Spiritual Objectivity

The core of spirituality is love. This was the emphasis of Jesus for His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 4:7-21; 5:1-3). The Tier 3 disciple loves everyone, irrespective of idiosyncrasies (Rom. 12:9; 1 Cor. 8:1). “May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race as much as we love you” (1 Th. 3:12, 13, JBP); “Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ” (Eph. 5:2, NLT); “Do everything with love” (1 Cor. 16:14 NLT); “Keep on loving others as long as life lasts...then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent” (Heb. 6:11, 12 NLT). The Tier 3 disciple gets to the point that he is able to love his enemies (Mt. 5:43-48). In the final analysis: “All that matters now is living in the faith that is activated and brought to perfection by love” (Galatians 5:6, The Passion Translation, 2018). The daily experience of love in the kingdom of God, challenges a disciple to establish this spirituality in his/her life out of which will come the impact intended upon the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷Diana L. Villagas, “Spirituality and Belief: Implications for Study and Practice of Christian Spirituality.” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74 (3), 4.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

world.⁴⁸ One of my mentors pointed out the efficacy of love in influencing others: “You can tell anyone anything if they really believe you love them.”⁴⁹

The Challenge of Tier 3

Becoming a Tier 3 level disciple will not come overnight—it is more a destiny than a journey, but there are good benchmarks indicating a spiritual maturity (Mt. 7:16-20). Most have to struggle through living a Tier 2 life, moving out of immaturity to maturity, and then develop distinctions on the Tier 3 level. You will know the difference because your effectiveness level with people will rise. There are many more Scriptures to consider that point to a Tier 3 disciple of Jesus.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

This writer spent many years living as a Tier 2 disciple. In retrospect, my immaturity and shallowness did not serve the body well, and I confess I had damaging effects upon many with my legalism and mixed-bag spirituality. The saddest thing of all was the missed opportunities that could have emerged had I been a Tier 3 disciple. “It is a painful fact indeed to realize how poorly prepared most Christian leaders prove to be when they are invited to be spiritual leaders in the true sense.”⁵¹ How true this was with me.

⁴⁸ Van Der Merwe, “The Christian Spirituality of the Love of God: Conceptual and Experiential Perspectives Emanating from the Gospel of John,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41(1), 10. a2130.<http://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2130>

⁴⁹ Marlin S. Hoffman

⁵⁰ Mt. 5:19; 12:36-39; Mk. 9:38; 10:13, 14, 17-22, 35-46; Lk. 6:41-42; Acts 10:28; Rom. 12:9-21; 14:10, 13, 20; 1 Cor. 1:11, 12; 2:16; 3:1ff.; 4:10-13, 20; 11:17-19; 12:26; 2 Cor. 4:1-2, 7ff.; 5:14 “Christ love controls us,” 16, 17; 6:3-13; 7:1; 8:20; 11:28-29; 12:19; Gal. 1:10; 4:19; 5:22-25; 6:1, 14; Eph. 4:13-14; Phil. 3:8; Col. 3:12-14; 4:6; 1 Th. 2:10; 1 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Tim. 2:23-26; Tit. 1:6-9; Heb. 5:11-6:12; Jam. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:23

⁵¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Double Day, 1972), 37.

An UltimateLifeNow Position Paper

As I have had the opportunity to assess the growth of individual disciples and congregations, it has become apparently clear what has hindered progress with so many. Taking a Tier approach to assessing life in the fellowship has proven to be effective from this writer's experience with individuals and congregations. It objectifies that which hinders growth, and rather than condemning disciples on lower ground, it challenges them to higher ground (Tier 3).

Taking a deeper dive into a leader's life dealing with family of origin, unresolved attachment issues, will be beneficial helping to "enhance...skills for increasing greater personal mastery" for a leader's life, and in "functioning in relation" to others both in his family and church.⁵² Assessing the level of objectivity vs. subjectivity through testing (e.g., Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis—one of the finest measurement tools for such a thing) would put an individual disciple and/or a leader to start grasping this challenge to emerge into superb spiritual objectivity. This would be an excellent encouragement into a robust spirituality in a deprived world. "Grounding our spiritual feet [as a Tier 3 disciple] in the reality of this world is precisely what the gospel is all about."⁵³ Spirituality in the example of Christ is the most powerful. While we can never attain to a Tier 4 level of spiritual objectivity, living in the grace of God as a Tier 3 disciple is the level of living that will make a difference in the body of Christ and in the world.

Paul's encouragement to the young leader, Timothy, is germane as we close: "Give careful attention to your spiritual life and every cherished truth you teach, for living what you preach will then release even more abundant life inside of you and to all those who listen to you" (1 Timothy 4:16, The Passion Translation, 2018).

⁵² Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 6.

⁵³ Swindoll, xii.

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