

Pursuing the Heart of God



*A 7-Day devotional based on stories
from Care Net's Making Life Disciples*

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INTRODUCTION



PSALMS 116:5 NRSV

Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

I have the privilege of leading a national ministry that's intimately connected to the heart of God. In short, my job is to disseminate a ministry tool called *Making Life Disciples (MLD)* that's designed to equip a select group of individuals in a local church to offer compassion, hope, and help to women and men facing pregnancy decisions. We work hard every day to implement the vision of this resource in 1,000 churches by the end of 2020.

This devotional was created to give you a feel for what I'm starting to see God do nationally. What you'll read over seven days are the testimonies that have encouraged me the most this past year. Although I've changed some names to protect anonymity, I've tried to make as few edits as possible. I've done my best to present them in raw form with no spin so you can experience the same energy and stirrings that I have.

Ministry to the abortion-vulnerable is challenging: it is private and hidden; further, it has been politicized and disconnected from the gospel, discipleship, and grace. If things are going to change, the church must lead. We will all need the patience and perseverance of the hard-working farmer (2 Tim. 2:1-6). As the late A.W. Pink has well said:

A lot of our so-called Christian work today reminds me of little children when they first witness father or mother doing some gardening. The ground is prepared and then the seed is sown, and everyday the child goes into the garden and he looks around to see if the seed is beginning to sprout, and if it doesn't show any signs and he wants to make sure that the seed is beginning to sprout, he just scratches around amongst the soil. He wants to SEE something. My friends, that is what a lot of us are doing in so-called Christian work today! O we have so little confidence in the divine 'seed' to bring about the harvest that God has ordained it shall do.¹

May God give us all more confidence in his sovereign grace, and may these first authentic God-at-work accounts refresh your spirit and strengthen your faith!

Yours For Life,

Greg

¹*The Life of Arthur W. Pink by Iain Murray, p.46.*

PRAYER & PASTORAL LEADERSHIP



1 TIMOTHY 2:1 NLT

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.

EPHESIANS 4:11-12 NLT

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

Only God can energize more healthy, grace-based churches to lead in ministry to the abortion-vulnerable.

Because, unfortunately, abortion is a problem in the church, not just “out there.” Two national surveys confirm that four in ten women who have had abortions were attending church at least once a month at the time of their first abortion.¹ A story I received two weeks ago from one of our Pregnancy Decision Line coaches illustrates this reality well:

I spoke with a woman who was 11 weeks and three days along in her pregnancy. She described herself as a person of faith with a church community. Yet, she was considering abortion due to the morning sickness that she was experiencing. She has two older sons

age 7 and 4 and their father and the father of the current baby wants her to carry to term. Yet, she was considering abortion. Thankfully in our discussion she changed her mind.

Again, God *is* at work. More and more pastors are learning about these private, hidden issues and starting to speak to them. Often it starts with a local pregnancy center beginning to see churches in their area, not as problems to solve but, as partners to equip. One of the managers from a pregnancy center in Holland, MI, who emphasized that all their efforts begin with a season of prayer, shared the following fruit from their last year of ministry. Notice the importance they've placed on equipping pastors:

- We hosted several “Abortion and the Gospel” conversations; that is, quarterly meetings where various pastors talk about the problem of abortion in the church and the need for discipleship. Our last meeting had 26 attendees and, as a result, more churches in the area are considering using MLD and starting life teams.
- One of the pastors of a church who went through the MLD training recently had a first conversation with an abortion-vulnerable woman. We aren't sure if she ever went to a center or what she ended up deciding, but it was encouraging that one of our pastors was able to have the conversation.

²<https://www.care-net.org/churches-blog/church-abortion-survey>;
<https://www.gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>

DAY 1

- One post-abortive woman asked us if she might use her testimony to help others. We then invited her to attend our most recent “Abortion and the Gospel” conversation. At the meeting, one pastor asked, “How do we love the abortion-vulnerable/post-abortive in our congregation?” This brave woman was able to share her story and then respond, “I just need to know that my story is safe in the church and that my whole self is welcome.”

PRAYER:

God, we cannot decrease the number of abortions in a transformative way without you working behind the scenes to change the human heart. Please strengthen your local churches to lead with love and compassion. Please strengthen our pastors to lead with grace and courage, and please strengthen me today.

HEALING FOR THE POST-ABORTIVE



JAMES 5:16 NIV

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

ROMANS 8:38-39 NLT

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

One of the first stories of impact I heard when I started to research the impact of *Making Life Disciples* was related to the pain of post-abortion.

I talked with Lynn who had been the director of services for a pregnancy center and had worked in the pro-life movement for many years. Now retired and living in FL, she had a real heart for the abortion-vulnerable in her county and had started a center near her home that ran from 2003-2011. This center, regrettably, went out of business and so they merged with another pregnancy center in the area. Lynn went from a commute where she could literally walk to work to a 23-mile drive. She did this from 2012-2016 until, unfortunately, that center also closed. Now in a small coastal area with no center nearby, Lynn was really excited to hear about *MLD*—something created to equip the church to show compassion, hope, and help to those considering abortion.

In the fall of 2016, she approached her pastor to discuss the need for *MLD*. With his permission and blessing, she reached out to 4 other area churches, inviting them to take the *MLD* classes. She then ran the course for a group of 20 regular attenders every Sunday night for eight weeks. It was a great class with many personal stories shared. As the group grew closer and began to pray for one another, what was unexpected was that 7 out of the 20 participants admitted either privately to Lynn or in the group that they had had abortions. In this instance, *MLD* led to offering several post-abortion workshops that brought significant healing to the lives of both women and men.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for your love and the healing power of confession to safe people. Thank you for the cross and the restoration it brings to grieving hearts that regret their involvement in abortion. Please continue to heal me in places I need you most, and help me to be an instrument of your healing in the lives of others.

INTENTIONALITY & DISCIPLESHIP



ECCLESIASTES 11:6 NIV

Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

MATTHEW 28:19 ESV

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

I spoke at a pastor's luncheon in Eustis, FL hosted by a center director earlier this year and later received this update:

I am writing to let you know that we have successfully introduced Making Life Disciples to 38 pastors in our community! Of those 38, we have 8 that have taken the challenge to train a group of Life Disciples in their respective churches!

In three weeks, I will visit the graduates of those classes to begin a stronger relationship with them so we can begin to introduce our clients to them for mentoring and discipleship.

The effort has taken almost a year; however, we believe we will begin to see the fruit of our labor and it will last a lifetime! We

were caught in the web of trying to "be" the church [in its mission to make disciples], when we recognized the true calling for our center was to reach the abortion minded/abortion vulnerable... [as domestic missionaries with a specialized focus].

PRAYER

Lord, please help me trust in your sovereign purposes and plant seeds that lead to discipleship.

Please give me a profound knowledge that I can't control the results, nor do I have key to anyone's heart. Only you do.

PREPARATION & ENCOURAGEMENT



LUKE 12:35 NIV

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning.

ACTS 15:41 GOD'S WORD TRANSLATION

Paul went through the provinces of Syria and Cilicia and strengthened the churches.

Someone has said that “success is when preparation meets opportunity.” The note I received below is a great example of that as well as the role that encouragement plays in keeping vision fresh and alive:

I believe that I had mentioned to you at the [Care Net National] Conference that we had 3 churches that were graduating as soon as I returned. Upon their graduation, I went to meet with each class. Oh, they had so many questions! They of course wondered how soon it would be before they “got a girl”! Of course, I wondered the same thing!

I cannot believe it myself, but as I am writing this, we have “the girl” right now across from my office meeting with a Life Disciple (We are calling them ‘Life Coaches’...) This young woman... had an appointment for an abortion scheduled for next week, when she first came to us. During that appointment, she told our R.N. that she literally had nobody to help her during this difficult time. Marla, our R.N., knew immediately that we did have someone that could come alongside her!

The call was made and they have connected! The abortion appointment has been cancelled, however, as we know a baby is not safe until it is born! Please feel free to share this to encourage others! MLD works! We are watching it right now! And by the way, there is laughter coming from the room across the hall!

PRAYER

Lord, may I be prepared today for whatever you have for me. Please help me be an encouraging presence so that your work is strengthened and grows.

TRAINING OTHERS TO SHOW MERCY



2 TIMOTHY 2:2 NLT

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

JUDE 1:22 NLT

And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.

I'm often reminded that reaching the abortion-minded is high stakes poker. Further, I'm constantly reminding others that there's a big difference between winning an argument with a pro-choice person and actually showing compassion, hope, and help to a man or woman facing an unplanned pregnancy. I'm so grateful for those that are equipping the church to show mercy. Here's a recent example from a center director in eastern VA:

I just wanted you to know that we trained 25 people.... We had a commissioning dinner and celebration on Friday. On Monday morning one of our Life Disciples (LD) came into contact with an abortion-minded young woman who has an abortion appointment on Thursday. Now she has an ultrasound scheduled at our office on Wed. So grateful for our LD who has intervened and ministered to this young woman. Because of the intervention, this young woman is now more open (although still deciding) to continuing her pregnancy and seriously considering adoption. Prayers appreciated. Thanks for all you do....

PRAYER:

God, help me to empower others today—to generously share what I have with them and invest in their potential. Spirit, expand my ministry influence; blossom and protect life through my efforts.

PARTNERING TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL



HEBREWS 13:2 BEREAN STUDY BIBLE

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

GALATIANS 6:10, ESV

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

This story from Melanie Park, Executive Director of Amnion Pregnancy Center in PA, illustrates well the beauty of gospel partnerships:

Last November, my client advocate came to me with a seemingly impossible request: did I know of an individual or a church that could help her client's family?

A Muslim client had come to America with her husband and child only a year and half before we met her. She was faced with a tough pregnancy decision and came to our pregnancy center looking for referral services. Due to her language barrier she faced many disadvantages, and to add to an already seemingly impossible situation, her husband lost his job. As her mid-December cesarean section delivery loomed ever closer, our client and her family felt isolated, lonely, and friendless in their circumstances.

My client advocate and I were moved by our client's struggle and felt led to help this family. Despite knowing that churches would be extremely busy being that it was two weeks before Christmas, we knew that we still had to reach out. We felt led to contact two particular churches to see if they would have anyone who would be willing to minister to this family in need. These churches are both neighbors to our center and partner with us in our ministry. One of the churches had also started Making Life Disciples, while the other had just completed an evangelism training session that we had attended. In other words, these churches were in the business of reaching out and loving others in the name of Jesus.

I hoped that maybe someone might be willing to take a meal to this family, or help in some small way despite the busy time of the year. I didn't have to wait in anticipation long because both churches responded IMMEDIATELY, wholeheartedly thanking me for reaching out with this opportunity to love and serve a family in need. This was such an encouragement to me personally.

Each church began to reach out to the family through meals, referrals for jobs, visits, maintenance to fix their broken furnace, and most importantly extending friendship to a family that felt friendless. Each church worked seamlessly with the other to serve this family well. One church focused on getting the dad job ready with language and skills training, while the other church focused on family support, meals, and other day-to-day needs.

DAY 6

PRAYER:

Lord, let me be eager and ready to work with others to show hospitality. Make me an instrument of your peace.

IN IT WITH GOD FOR THE LONG-HAUL



GALATIANS 6:9 NIV

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

LUKE 15:10 NLT

In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.

Sometimes we think—or certainly want—our discipleship efforts to be like biting into a York Peppermint Patty: joy explodes into the lives of those we're ministering to and things are never the same. Somebody gets introduced to Jesus and they're instantly transported into their "best life now" and live problem free, henceforth, forever more.

This is a fantasy and an unrealistic expectation that veteran believers must purge from their service to Christ. The problem is not God's power. He can knock someone off their horse (Acts 9) or even cause a donkey to do his bidding (Num. 22), but that's not His normal M.O. The

invitation to become a disciple of Jesus Christ is a costly, long-term journey, which many turn away from. Some go away grieved (Matt. 19:22) and we grieve when they go away. Further, the wise servant of Christ will avoid over-helping. Yet, this doesn't change the need for patience and longsuffering. Nor does it change our excitement in seeing even one sinner come to repentance!

Although it's still a work in progress, Allison's story is a case in point.

Beth led a team at her church in Sacramento, CA through *MLD* in the fall of 2016. After completing the training, they were eager to offer their services. While waiting, Beth got a call from a couple in her church, Bob and Lori, offering to house a homeless pregnant woman should the need arise. Beth then told her local pregnancy center (PC) about the offer.

Shortly after, Brenda, the PC director, learned of a pregnant young woman, Allison, through a local foster care agency. Allison had aged out of the system and needed transportation for appointments and errands. Brenda called Beth, the *MLD* team leader, and Beth reached out via text to Allison. When they finally met, Allison had gone from considering abortion, to deciding against it, to apathy about her pregnancy.

Beth was eager to put into practice skills she had learned: authenticity, acceptance, humility, and empathy. She began driving Allison on select errands and appointments, opportunities that gave plenty of time to begin to build a relationship. In fact, Beth wrote, "Once she [Allison] saw her baby's ultrasound pictures, she moved from apathy to eager anticipation. She even texted them to ME!"

During this time, Allison was staying with an older couple that decided to downsize to a one bedroom apartment. This left Allison in need of housing and, providentially, Bob and Lori's

housing offer was still available. In fact, it was even in the same county Allison was receiving benefits from! She moved in with them in July of 2017 and then one of Allison’s friends bought her a car. This meant Beth didn’t need to drive her anymore, a good thing since she planned to be away for three weeks. Sadly, when Beth returned, Allison seemed to have no desire to see her anymore.

Beth then met with Brenda from the local PC for encouragement and learned that Allison, as her due date grew closer, was now considering adoption. Bob and Lori knew little about this this topic, so they turned to Brenda for help. This led to Allison choosing potential adoptive parents and all seemed well. When Allison had her baby in September, however, she changed her mind and sent the family away.

Although Allison had still not responded to Beth, Beth asked Bob and Lori to attend a PC gala with her “to celebrate, find encouragement, and be blessed.” They had a great time together and, after the event, Beth gave Bob and Lori a card with some cash to give to Allison.

During this time, still not hearing from Allison, Beth also learned that Bob and Lori felt hesitant to talk with Allison about the gospel. In fact, Beth learned that Allison would not even come to the dinner table until *after* Bob and Lori had prayed. Beth shared learnings with Bob and Lori from a Care Net conference workshop on sharing your faith, and they felt much better equipped to initiate a respectful and non-threatening conversation.

On October 11, 2017, Allison finally texted Beth to say “Thank you for the card!! You need to come visit!” Beth was ecstatic, as it was the first she’d heard from Allison since July. This interaction led to a personal visit, during which Beth was able to hold Allison’s new baby, Dillon! Beth’s church then had a baby shower for Allison, which she attended, and gave her many gifts and offers of help.

Truthfully, Allison still needs a lot love and support. She struggles to overcome the effects of previous abuse and some days can’t even get herself out of bed. She had an exciting reunion with her birth father and moved in with him; however, the relationship soon fell apart and she had to move out. Even now, Bob and Lori experience much frustration and concern over Allison as they continue to pray over and mentor her.

As you can see, Allison’s story is a fragile work in progress—the ending of which is not yet clear.

So, what can we learn from this long and winding road? Here are five things this story teaches us about being a life disciple:

1. It includes many ups and downs, and requires commitment and emotional intelligence. Making life disciples is more than going through a class. It takes lots of perseverance and patience to partner with God in offering compassion, hope, and help.
2. It’s very relational and requires working closely with others. As Beth noted in sharing the above, **“I learned that sometimes we only play a small part in the rescue of a**

DAY 7

pregnant woman in need. It's up to many of us, the centers, the church, and community resources to provide the support she needs."

3. Life disciples can coach and present options (even be part of saving a baby's life!), but they can't control outcomes and must always respect others' choices.
4. Life disciples keep a pulse on the situation: they can serve when called upon or fade into the background when necessary.
5. Finally, it doesn't always result in conversion. Still, life disciples never lose sight of God's heart for those they serve: to trust Christ, pursue marriage to a good spouse, and raise kids like Dillon in healthy families, supported by a loving, grace-based church. For many of us, there's no more glorious and compelling vision on the planet!

PRAYER:

Lord, please keep me focused on the end goal of gospel transformation and discipleship. Give me perseverance, realistic expectations, and encouragement that what I do for you is never wasted. Please do what only you can do today and bless the work of my hands!

