In the fall of 1966, I began a journey that stretched my mind, penetrated my heart and prepared my hands for service at levels I could have not have imagined. Lacking a high school diploma, and convinced that the life of the mind was in direct conflict with the life of the heart, I transferred to what was then called Spring Arbor College in Michigan. There I encountered a call to radical whole person learning - I confronted something called the Spring Arbor Concept.

I did not fully appreciate the Concept while I was a student. Despite my resistance, an integrated profile of those who serve God’s purposes in their generation began to emerge. Slowly I was convinced that I must be a disciple of the sanctified mind and the purified heart if I was to use my hands effectively and contribute meaningfully to the work of God’s Kingdom. Today, my passion for Christ, vision for service and commitment to let the mind of Christ be in me Ph.2: 5 remains deeply rooted in the images of a lamp, the cross and a needy world I first encountered as an undergraduate student.

Here I share a personal pilgrimage into the mission, message and meaning of whole person discipleship. This is primarily a theological rather than methodological journey – a process of transformation more than information. It is more autobiographical than pedagogical. It is not my desire to present this model as the primary or preferred means for effective discipleship. My goal is to encourage, motivate and inspire you to take your distinctive understandings, experiences and applications of the call to whole person discipleship to their next levels. I believe, as Christ-centered disciples, ours is ultimately a calling to stretch minds, cradle hearts and equip outstretched hands for competent, compassionate service.

The Lamp of Learning: Stretching the Renewed Mind

In the context of Spring Arbor University’s approach to whole person education, I was challenged first to commit my life to a heads first journey. Having come to faith in Jesus Christ out of a troubled and dysfunctional home, I needed to understand that it was necessary to become a mature follower of Christ through the disciplines of the renewed mind.

I learned that effective discipleship is driven by the Great Commission mandate to go and make disciples teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded Mt. 28:20. The building blocks of mature discipleship rest upon the foundation of divine revelation. Those who follow the Christ see the world differently because they understand it
through the mind, eyes and heart of Jesus. He is the clearest revelation of all that is ultimately and eternally true.

Our relationship with Christ begins with revelation, the divinely initiated enlightening, that we need a Savior. *Come let us reason together says the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow* Is.1:18. Jesus spent more time teaching than in any other single activity. The primary means He used to turn fishermen, tax collectors, harlots and zealots into revolutionaries able to turn their culture upside down was the transforming of the mind guided, guarded and enabled by the Spirit of Truth. While these disciples marveled at our Lord’s miracles they were enlisted by His message – a call to a Christian-counter culture delivered with a depth of insight and level of authority they had not experienced previously.

This life of the enlightened mind shaped the western intellectual, social and cultural world for centuries after their Lord’s death. The early Church Fathers believed that followers of Christ should be broadly skilled both in and beyond the teachings of Scripture and the Church in their search for truth. This heads first calling was fueled by the conviction that all that is “True” finds both its genesis and its sustenance in the One who is *the way, the Truth and the life* Jn.14: 6 – *that in Him we live and move and have our being* Acts 17:28.

As a result, serious scholars throughout the history of the Christian movement emphasized following Jesus with minds transformed rather than conformed to secular paradigms. Learning and serving were anchored to the conviction that all “truth” is God’s Truth. Martin Luther, in a sermon to the political leaders of his day (“Keeping Children in School” 1530) established the central place of education, championing the renewing of the mind across multiple learning disciplines. He taught that children needed to study not only languages and history but also singing and music *together with the whole of mathematics*. The ancient Greeks trained their children in these disciplines and, as a result, he believed, grew up to be people of *wondrous ability* subsequently *fit for anything*.

John Milton, in his “Tractate on Education” sent to Master Samuel Hartlib, emphasized the value of broad and comprehensive learning, what we know today as the Liberal Arts, when he suggested that *a complete and generous education is one that fits a person to perform all the offices, both private and public, of peace and of war*. He insisted in his treatise “Of Education” (1644) that the goal of learning is to *repair the ruins of our first parents* by knowing God and, out of that knowledge, to love Him, imitate Him and be like Him.

T.S. Elliott picked up the theme of a discipleship that deepens when we seek to learn beyond our cultural and intellectual comfort zones. Mary Cox Garner, in *The Hidden Soul of Words* (2004 page 69), quotes Milton’s belief about stretching the mind. *No one can become truly educated without having pursued some study in which they*
took no interest – for it is part of education to learn to interest ourselves in subjects for which we have no aptitude.

C.S. Lewis, in a sermon entitled Learning in War Time quoted in The Weight of Glory (1976, page 58), challenged the students of his day to take time for a thorough education even in the midst of national turmoil. To be ignorant now would be to throw down our weapons and betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.

One of the earliest declarations in America of this conviction that true discipleship is a heads first endeavor are the words recorded in the statement of Harvard University’s founding purposes. Let every student be plainly instructed to consider that the main end of life is to know God and Jesus Christ and therefore to lay Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.

As an undergraduate, I was challenged to know God in every expression of creation and discipline of human learning. To lay Christ as the only foundation calls us to catch God at work in every place, plan, process and person so that we can advance His purposes in each for the glory of Jesus Christ. I discovered a new application of a favorite childhood game. With the belief that God is always up to something somewhere and with someone, I chose to greet each new learning challenge with the prayer “come out, come out wherever you are”. In my goal as a faithful, disciple I give myself to the Christ-centered commitment of stretching my mind, reaching for the highest levels of learning so that others might be grounded in the deepest levels of revelation.

As we master the disciplines of the stretched mind, laying hold of the lamp of learning as a part of a core commitment to heads first discipleship, we honor Paul’s command not to be conformed to the world but transformed by the renewing of your mind Rom.12: 2. I challenge you to be lifelong learners studying to show yourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth 2 Tim.2: 15.

The Cross: Cradling the Restored Heart

One of the great challenges of heads first discipleship, however, is that left to itself learning can lead to arrogance, isolation and self pre-occupation. The greater the knowledge we acquire, the more critical it is that, with the learning, we nurture compassion. Knowledge is the blossom of the exercised mind. Compassion is the fruit of the circumcised heart. The cross became for me the symbol of the restored heart.

The Great Commission focuses on the heads first calling of teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded. His other “Great”, the Great Commandment Mt. 12:30-31, is the key to employing our knowledge for the ultimate good of humanity. We must embrace
Jesus’ command to love the Lord our God with our total being – body and spirit as well as mind – and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Great Commission’s *teaching them to obey* is the **method** of heads first discipleship. The Great Commandment’s call to love God, our neighbor and ourselves is the **motivation** that restores and renews the hearts of informed disciples.

It became clear that while I held the lamp of learning in one hand I must embrace the love of God demonstrated on the cross of Christ with the other. To **comprehend** Jesus Christ as the Truth we must **apprehend** Him as the way and the life in every dimension of learning, living and serving. Jesus becomes our supreme teacher when we embrace Him as our suffering Savior. Loving God and humanity answers the “so what” questions of learning providing both meaning to and motivation for the pursuit of Truth. Our scholarship is enlivened when it becomes the means to change both hearts and minds. To embrace the cross is to receive Christ’s redeeming work accomplished on that “tree” following its shadow into sacrificial, risk taking love for others.

My experiences in a variety of communities of learners have been punctuated with the convicting and conforming presence of our Lord’s love in our midst. During my days as a student, and in the years following on the administration and faculty, my life encountered what I see now as divine appointments that forced me to confront the Lord’s redeeming love of Calvary. Often these occurred in chapel awakening me to a need for forgiveness or the hunger for a deeper commitment. At other times, it was a sustained knocking disrupting my academic and social calendar for days until His work was completed. I realize now that He was present in the curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities lovingly reminding me that in Him my intellectual, social and professional life has its ultimate meaning.

Embracing the saving and transforming work of the cross sets us free to pick up the love lessons of that cross challenging us to invest and spend ourselves for others. One of the most important resources for me in this quest to embrace the cross in my calling to fulfill the “go and teach” essence of the Great Commission is Parker J. Palmer’s *The Courage to Teach* (1998). Palmer lays out the following premise: **good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.** He continues: **In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students and to connect them with the subject depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood – and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning** (pg. 10).

In one of my teaching assignments a student gave me a plaque whose saying sums up the challenge to embrace the cross perspective in our Great Commission efforts – *to learn and never be satisfied is wisdom, to teach and never be weary is love.* I saw the crucified Jesus so often in the lives of faculty, staff and fellow students who became His encouragers for embracing the love of the cross. Theirs was a journey of a **long obedience in the same direction** willing to embrace at any cost and consequence God’s call to love unreservedly and sacrificially. Many of those living epistles continue...
teaching and mentoring today’s students in the “more excellent way” I Cor. 13. So many others, now held by the nail-scarred hands of Jesus awaiting the resurrection, live for me as models of what philosopher Elton Trueblood calls in his book A Life of Search (Friends United Press: 1996) disciples of both the tough mind and the tender heart.

This restored heart is the “value added” expected by the vast majority of students who choose a Christian University. For those of us who believe that the call to teach is a means to invest deeply in the lives as well as the minds of our students, the principle of self-sacrificing love rings true. In the conviction that God so loved that he gave His Son John 3:16, and that the Son so loved that he gave His life, we find the courage to teach as Jesus taught.

I urge you to embrace and share the liberating and enabling love symbolized by the cross. Look for appropriate opportunities to demonstrate that love through acts of caring, mercy, grace and compassion. Call one another to excellence, creativity and discipline through the administration of a “tough love” that speaks frankly seasoned with caring and commitment. Be open about your personal spiritual journey. Be transparent about both your successes and failures - your honest doubts as well as your deeply held convictions. Your life, and those you “teach” through it, will change as you pursue truth while embracing the restored heart God is giving you in the shadow of an old rugged cross.

The Waiting World: Outstretched Hands

With the lamp of learning in one hand and the cross of the Christ in the other, His disciples also are called to a life of service that produces tangible, life-changing and world-shaping results. Throughout the centuries mature followers of Jesus not only thought clearly and loved deeply – they served competently, compassionately and sacrificially. Transformed minds and purified hearts are manifested in and validated by the exceptional work they perform and the sacrificial service they render. True discipleship, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer eloquently communicated by both pen and life, is usually a costly discipleship focused on the needs and opportunities of a waiting world.

Christ-centered learning creates in us the capacity for Christ-modeled loving. Loving God with our total being and others as ourselves puts head, heart, hands and feet to the lessons we have learned. Listen to this description of a disciple of both the tough mind and the tender heart recorded in James 2:14-18.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or a sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them “Depart in peace: be warmed and filled” but you do not give them the things that are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You
have faith and I have works”. Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works.

To and for what end are we enlightened by learning and enlivened for loving? It is so that we can do the Father’s business as revealed in the life of Christ. Like the Master we are called to extend our hands to the poor, binding up the broken hearted, proclaiming release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed and declaring that now is the time of the Lord’s acceptance Luke 4:18-19. It is a call to demonstrate the breadth of our learning and the depth of our loving by stretching out competent, compassionate hands to serve a needy world.

The enlightened and the enlivened develop a compelling sense of social justice and global responsibility that calls us to touch the least, the left and the lost. It was on a mission trip to Spanish Harlem in the inner city of New York my junior year of college that I touched the heart and was challenged to extend the hands of Christ. Subsequent opportunities to serve and teach abroad in Europe, the Middle East and Far East deepened my understanding that wholeness requires a commitment to serve the purposes of God in our generation for every tongue, tribe and nation. It is in the conflicts and contexts of cross-cultural and multi-cultural engagement that our ideas are challenged and hearts stretched to serve global leadership causes larger than ourselves.

Outstretched hands however not only serve compassionately but also competently. Too often, committed Christians appear to sacrifice competence on the altar of compassion. We must do what we do with all of our might for the glory of God. The need for discipline, diligence and the commitment to achieve our fullest potential in the work at hand must guide our whole person understanding. This is a call to professional excellence if our loving acts are to be both credible and effective. The Christ taught with an authority and clarity that exceeded even the most skilled and learned of His day Mt. 7:29, Mark 1:22. He achieved His fullest potential through diligence and courage; we who serve in His name must do no less.

I encourage you to make to take learning and loving to these who need it most. This cup-of-cold-water service is, as the early Church understood in James 2:14-26, the tangible evidence that true wisdom is comprehended and perfect love embraced. As poet, Annie Johnson Flint so beautifully declared it:

Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today;  
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in His way.  
We are the only Bible the careless will read;  
We are the sinners’ gospel; we are scoffers the creed.  
We are the Lord’s last message written in deed and word.  
But what if the type is crooked, what if the print is blurred?
As you lift the lamp of learning in one hand and embrace the cross of Christ with the other, let your feet take you to the people and places where Jesus would be found if He were physically among us today. As you do it, do it with all your might for the glory of God.

**Developing a Personal Theology of Whole Person Discipleship**

As I return, after three University Presidencies, to my first love of teaching I feel the need to develop a comprehensive personal theology to bring the various aspects of Christ-centered discipleship together in an integrated whole. Ultimately, I contend, effective whole person discipleship must be centered more in a person (Jesus Christ) than in a philosophy or a process. It was through India’s 2004 Kolkata Conference of the International Council for Higher Education that I found the context that informs this next chapter of my calling. Using the framework of the Conference’s purpose statement, I developed a narrative designed to tie the three spokes of the whole person model to the hub of Christ-centered learning and serving.

Jesus’ Great Commission authoritatively associates education and mission, Go… make disciples…teach. Christ-centered education is distinguished from general programs of education in that it is intimately connected to the purposes of God in relation to creation and particularly humanity. Christ-centered education informs and equips the student with the Christian perspective as reflected in God’s Word initiating a positive, practical and respectful dialogue with the world about the implications of such a perspective. This is the essence of the “tough mind” encouraged by Christian scholars like Elton Trueblood, Francis Schaeffer and C.S. Lewis.

Christ-centered education moves beyond cognitive learning and skill acquisition to intentional discipleship as its ultimate objective. The integration of faith and learning examines all academic disciplines asking how the events and theories studied relate to and reveal the purposes of God. Christ-centered education not only examines the learning event but also explores its implied morality. Christ-centered education is holistic; as such, its potential for personal and societal transformation is unlimited.

To be truly Christ-centered, education must reflect the major biblical themes of love, righteousness and justice. All three of these are part of the heart transformation that occurs when the mind is challenged to see and serve the world as Christ did. Christ-centered education lives out these concepts and fosters them throughout its educational programs. Christ-centered education’s Great Commandment motivation must equip students to address poverty, illness, exploitation, discrimination and oppression in the world – all of which are contrary to the will of the loving Father God as revealed in His Son Jesus Christ.
Christian education must not just be available to those who can afford it and/or have the potential to be influential in the future. It must be available to those in poverty and who, for reasons of culture, social position, political oppression, race, gender and ethnicity are denied such opportunities. Ultimately, Christ-centered education must fuel the Great Commission mission and Great Commandment motivation of Christ’s Church – to address and resolve human meaningless and suffering by understanding, loving, going, teaching and serving.

With Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, the three elements of the renewed mind, restored heart and outstretched hands become a creative force in both precept and application. I am experiencing new energy for and deeper understanding of whole person discipleship as I examine its out workings in the teachings and actions of the Christ. The theology of whole person discipleship requires an incarnation found in the Word who became flesh. I encourage you to develop such an integrated and applied theology that stretches minds, cradles hearts and equips future generations of leaders to serve a waiting world with both compassion and excellence.

Affirmation and Exhortation

We who are called to be twenty-first century disciples have a unique, privileged and providential opportunity to influence the holistic development of this generation and, if Jesus tarries, beyond. Ours is a sacred calling not only to inform but also to model the disciplines of the renewed mind, restored heart and competent, compassionate service with our reformed and reforming hands.

Let us embrace the call to a life of heads first and hearts fast discipleship, discovering and appropriating each opportunity before us. Let us extend our competent and compassionate hands to a world that longs for our well-trained touch and caring embrace. Let us commit ourselves to this journey of life-long learning, laying Jesus Christ as the only sure foundation. May we have a fresh revelation of God in every place, plan, process and person. Let us be fit for anything because the mind, heart and outstretched hands of Jesus have become our everything. Let us lift up our lamps of learning and embrace the cross – a watching world awaits the touch of our outstretched hands!

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