

The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ

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Discipleship is a way of life for our entire life.

Learning from and following a teacher

Discipleship occurs when one person influences another and the result is a changed heart and mind. It happens when people so deeply experience God's love that they can do nothing other than affect those around them.

Disciples

- Need vision to inspire us
- Need accountability to receive training
- Need structure to empower us
- Need relationship where we experience love

Disciple-Making

- Deliverance
- Development
- Deployment

Passion

Faith without discipleship is not a genuine faith. Exploring a faith that embraces discipleship also implies that there is a faith without discipleship.\

"Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCIPLES

- A disciple abides in Christ through the Word and prayer (John 15:7).
- A disciple bears much fruit (verse 8).
- A disciple responds to God's love with obedience (verses 9-10).
- A disciple possesses joy (verse 11).
- A disciple loves as Christ loved (verses 12-13).

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES OF DISCIPLES

- A disciple submits to a teacher who teaches him or her how to follow Jesus.
- A disciple learns Jesus' words.
- A disciple learns Jesus' way of ministry.
- A disciple imitates Jesus' life and character.
- A disciple finds and teaches other disciples for Jesus.

Unique in How We Should Apply It Now

Let's summarize exactly what a disciple should be.

1. A disciple submits to a teacher who teaches her how to follow Jesus.
2. A disciple learns Jesus' words.
3. A disciple learns Jesus' way of ministry.
4. A disciple imitates Jesus' life and character.
5. A disciple finds and teaches other disciples who also follow Jesus.

NECESSARY INGREDIENTS FOR A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Trust

Grace

Humility

Submission

Affirmation

While some people resist the idea that we can measure something as mystical as spiritual progress, clear examples of spiritual stages can be found in Scripture:

- Recent converts shouldn't be considered for leadership (see 1 Timothy 3:6).
- New believers should long like newborn babies for the pure spiritual milk of the Word (see 1 Peter 2: 1-3).
- Disciples shouldn't be caught in a perpetual spiritual babyhood (see Hebrews 5:13).
- Mature followers of Jesus are distinguished from those who, like infants, are tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine (see Ephesians 4: 14).

Eight Steps for Training Disciples

Robert Coleman's eloquent and succinct *the Master Plan of Evangelism* essentially took apart Jesus' life and put it back together again, identifying eight steps Jesus used to make and to equip disciples. Let's look at a summary of those steps.

1. *Selection-people were his method.* Jesus believed that people should reach other people. He could have used an exclusive barrage of miracles, or he could have brought everything to conclusion while on earth.

Instead he chose common men and women like us to reach the world. This demonstrates not only his love for us, but also his confidence in us.

2. *Association-he stayed with them.* With the first disciples, the essence of Jesus' training meant just letting his disciples follow him. He drew them close to himself, becoming his own school and curriculum.
3. *Consecration-he required obedience.* Jesus expected his disciples to obey him. He didn't require them to be smart, but he wanted them to be loyal- to the extent that obeying him became the distinguishing mark they were known by. "Disciples" meant they were the Master's "learners" or "pupils." Later Jesus' disciples became known as "Christians" (Acts 11:26), a fitting description of obedient followers who took on the character of their leader.
4. *Impartation-he gave himself away.* Jesus gave his disciples everything: what the Father had given him (John 15:5); his peace (John 16:33); his joy (John 15:11); the keys to his kingdom (Matthew 16:19); and his own glory (John 17:22,24). He withheld nothing, not even his life.
5. *Demonstration-he showed them how to live.* Jesus showed the disciples how to pray, study, and relate to others. More than twenty times the Gospels recount Jesus' practice of prayer. He taught the disciples about the use of Scripture' by extensively using words from the Old Testament. As the disciples saw Jesus interact with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, and many others, Jesus showed them how to talk to and how to treat others.
6. *Delegation-he assigned them work.* From day one, Jesus prepared his disciples to take over the mission. He gradually turned over responsibility, sending out the seventy (Matthew 10: 1-42) and giving extensive instructions to the Twelve (Luke 10:1-20). He told the disciples to follow his methods, to expect hardships, and to go out in pairs. Following his resurrection, he clearly gave the disciples the responsibility to take the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28: 18-20; Acts 1:8).
7. *Supervision-he kept checking on them.* When Jesus gave the disciples work to do, he followed up. He listened to their reports and blessed them. When he was with the disciples, he spent time helping them understand the reason for a previous action or

preparing them for a new experience. He used questions, illustrations, warnings, and admonitions to teach the disciples what they needed to know to reach the world.

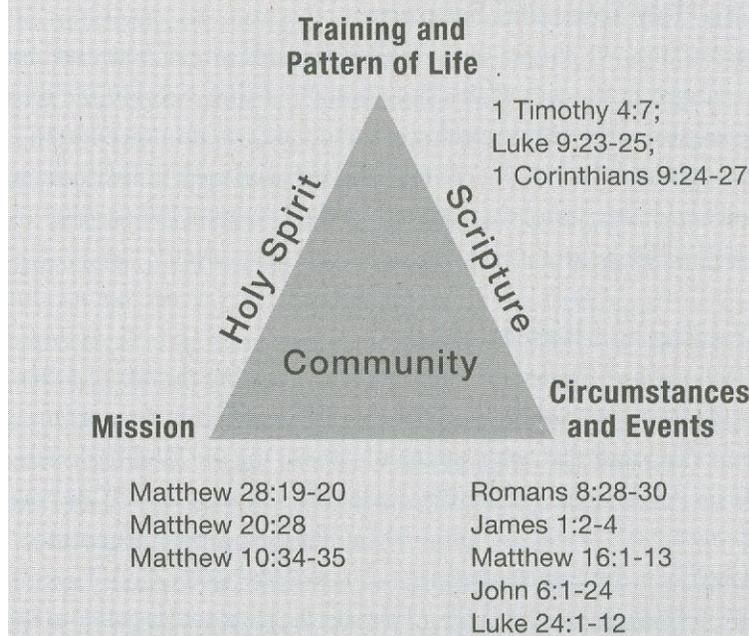
8. *Reproduction-he expected them to reproduce.* Jesus told the disciples to pray for workers (Matthew 9:36-38), and he called them to teach everyone to obey his teaching (Matthew 28:20). He required the costly elements of leadership development and reproduction, and expected the disciples to reproduce by finding other disciples who would also follow Jesus.

JESUS' MODEL FOR DEVELOPING FOLLOWERS

Jesus marked these four phases with his own words. We might want to think of them as four key invitations.

1. "Come and see" occurred during a four- or five-month period when Jesus introduced a group of disciples to the nature of himself and ministry.
2. "Come and follow me" was a ten-month period when the five, plus others, temporarily left their professions to travel with Jesus.
3. "Come and be with me" lasted nearly twenty months. During that time, Jesus concentrated on the Twelve he called to be with him so they could go out and preach.
4. "Remain in me" describes the most dramatic change the disciples underwent. Jesus was leaving and they would begin relating to him through the Holy Spirit and through the church. This phase began in the Upper Room and continues into the present. Let's look more closely at each phase

TRANSFORMATION TRIANGLE



MENTORING

Mentored by God's Word

- Be "alone with God's Word." Don't allow commentaries to get in the way of the text itself.
- Create silence for God's Word. Otherwise you can forget that it is God's Word or not hear it above the "noises" of your own cultural dispositions.
- Regard Scripture as the mirror you look into and respond as you see yourself as a sinner.
- Read Scripture contritely, humbly, and open to God's message.
- Read it responsively, with the intention to act on it and "do the truth."
- Allow the biblical narrative to draw you into its storytelling.
- Appropriately personalize the message of God's Word for yourself.
- Read Scripture hopefully, believing "all things" are possible for God.

MANAGEMENT OF COMMITMENTS

Do you want to love people? Then help them keep their commitments to God. Are you willing to have well-intentioned, spiritually motivated believers become hostile and turn on you? Then help them keep their commitments to God. Helping people keep their commitments to God might be a leader's greatest challenge, so consider the following helpful hints.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Teaching disciples to set aside a consumer mentality would be easier if all Christians were at the same place in their spiritual lives. But of course, every single member of a church is at a different spiritual age. Let's look at a few stages in which most believers land.

The Seeker

A seeker is any person who seeks meaning and answers in a religious context. We usually think of a seeker as unchurched. All churches should remove as many barriers as possible for seekers, yet there's no need to focus entirely on them.

The Starter

A starter is a new disciple who is eager, willing, and naive in the ways of church. The most strategic move is to partner starters with healthy disciples who can walk with them through the first year. But the process shouldn't stop there. These mentor partnerships should be part of us for all our lives.

The Struggler

Strugglers have trouble working through difficulties. Because an entire classification of damaged or wounded strugglers now populates congregations, I want to dwell on this level a bit longer.

The Stagnant

The stagnant people are stuck spiritually as a result of neglect. They neglect the practice of spiritual disciplines and choose to live off yesterday's manna-the doctrines and experiences from the past.

Stagnant people can be very dangerous to the church because they tend to be unteachable and complaining. Often they hold tight to the organization's traditions and relics. At times a test or dramatic change in their lives stirs them from their spiritual slumber.

While stagnant people certainly deserve to be loved and cared for, they also should be exhorted and disciplined when necessary. The biggest mistake a pastor or church worker can make is giving undue attention to stagnant people or allowing their complaining spirits to bring discouragement.

The Stable

The stable people are faithful and growing disciples. You can count on them to train, to give, to serve, to encourage, and to pray for others. Leaders should spend most of their time cultivating these people. They provide the key to reaching many of the stagnant. They willingly stand alongside the struggler. They help the seeker feel welcome. They happily give direction to the starter.

THE QUALITIES OF REPRODUCTION AND MULTIPLICATION

In spite of his lack of self-confidence and need for encouragement, Timothy exemplified qualities that leaders look for in their own Timothys.

Proper Selection of Personnel

The foundational quality for giving someone responsibility is that person's faithfulness. A faithful person is one who shows up, who does what she says she will do, and who does it consistently.

Several Passes on the Sacred Deposit

Delegation remains the number-one challenge in management. Captains of industry find that passing on work to others is the most frustrating part of their job. But creating an environment of reproduction is far more comprehensive than delegation.

Reproduction is about more than the completion of a task. It's about passing on a transformed life.

Passing on to the Right People

The right people also can teach. That doesn't mean the gift of teaching; it means the interest and ability to explain to others and to show them the way of Jesus. Some people can't handle this because either they're spiritually weak or they don't have the interest. The *New International Version* uses *qualified* in 2 Timothy 2:2. Sometimes reliable people aren't qualified to teach. Others might be qualified in ability, but they're not reliable (and therefore not qualified). The right people have both faithfulness and ability.

Imitation, Not Impersonation

Impersonation of a greatly loved leader isn't the worse offense, with the possible exception of impersonating Elvis. Young people naturally want to wear athletic gear and clothes like those of their heroes. But Paul reveals the difference between impersonation and the biblical tradition of imitation in his correspondence to the Corinthian church.

What Can Be Passed On

Apparently what Paul passed to Timothy wasn't personality or wardrobe. The reason he sent Timothy involved at least three qualities:

FIVE MODELS OF EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

THE COMPETENCIES MODEL: PANTEGO BIBLE CHURCH, DALLAS

This model is a highly integrated approach to discipleship that stands out in its emphasis on personal assessment and integration. The model is based on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission and broken into thirty specific competencies: ten core beliefs, ten core practices, and ten core virtues. The process considers these thirty dimensions in light of the disciple's relationship with God and with other people.

This model requires the substantive integration of everything the church does. The worship services provide inspiration to become disciples, and the sermons are built around the thirty core competencies. The competencies model doesn't use events. This model also minimizes other church programs and specialized ministries in favor of accomplishing all ministry through these existing avenues. Each person in the church goes through assessment and then engages in practices that can improve their spiritual strength.

THE MISSIONAL MODEL: FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH OF LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

This kind of approach matches the church's purpose with its programs. The mission of the church is to help people become spiritually mature as manifested in six core qualities or competencies:

1. Being passionately committed to Jesus Christ
2. Evaluating everything in their lives according to biblical standards
3. Being deeply committed to having a healthy family
4. Being morally pure
5. Being evangelistically bold
6. Being socially responsible and influential

The church sponsors small groups that make it possible for the members to create a Personal Development Plan. The church calendar is developed a year in advance to enable people to create a stable plan of activity. Once the personal plan is developed, the individual shares it with the others in his or her small group. The group encourages and prays for one another throughout the year in their efforts to grow in their areas of emphasis.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD MODEL: PERIMETER CHURCH, ATLANTA

People new to the church attend an inquirer's class to gain a general overview of the church. Once they decide they want to get serious about involvement, they join a neighborhood congregation, which is a group of fifteen to twenty people from the same geographic location. That group meets twice each month. One meeting focuses on worship, teaching, and fellowship, with members encouraged to invite guests. Members can invite guests to either meeting. The group is led by a lay pastor who has received extensive preparation via a pastoral training process complete with qualifying tests, classroom teaching, textbooks, written tests, and oral examinations. The neighborhood congregation is the church's primary delivery point for spiritual nurture and care. It is also the main launching pad for outreach opportunities. Multiple neighborhood congregations are linked together for outreach activities, such as concerts at the church.

Members of the geographic units are encouraged to get involved in a more intensive discipling environment by joining a discipleship team. Each discipler leads five to nine individuals of the same gender through the developmental process. Each participant creates a personal life plan. The plan defines the person's mission, vision, values, goals, and schedule for pursuing desired growth outcomes.

The plan also identifies how the individual will strive to mature in five specific areas:

1. Bible knowledge
2. Practical ministry skills
3. Outreach
4. Prayer
5. Accountability

The program runs on three-year cycles, divided into six six-week modules per year.

THE WORLDVIEW MODEL:
FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH NORTH, PLANO, TEXAS

The primary thrust of the Worldview Model is imparting biblical wisdom that leads to personal transformation. This model is designed to increase people's participation in the church, to upgrade their level of service to other people, and to improve their ability to understand issues and make decisions from a biblical perspective. The primary objective of this process is to encourage people to think and behave biblically-in other words, to adopt a truly biblical worldview.

The model relies on a two-year process that gives groups of people a thorough grounding in the foundational truths of Christianity. The discipleship curriculum known as the Discovery Series encompasses four topical books requiring an average of sixty to ninety minutes per week in personal reading, study, and reflection.

The training asks people to:

- Identify the issue at hand
- Study the Bible in relation to that issue
- Gather wisdom from other sources
- Make a personal response to the accumulated information
- Discuss that response with the other members of the group
- Develop personal strategies for living out the truth discovered

THE LECTURE-LAB MODEL: NORTH COAST CHURCH, VISTA, CALIFORNIA

This is the "loosest" or most casual of the five spiritual development approaches. In this case, the sermon becomes more than a warm and fuzzy-but-forgettable message. Because the sermon material forms the substantive foundation of a second go-round for small group participants, the biblical principles imparted are hammered home at least twice.

Clearly, the major downside of the model- but one that could be overcome without much difficulty-is the absence of any objective, broad-based evaluation system. The church does make some effort to determine the spiritual health of believers through headcounts, ease of recruiting participants for ministry opportunities, and anecdotal evidence.

A "BEST OF" MODEL

The following is Barna's summary of these five models. These may be the most helpful for application into life and ministry.

- The senior pastor is an irreplaceable advocate of discipleship.
- Church membership is granted only when a person covenants to participate in a focused, demanding discipleship process.
- All ministry programs are intimately tied to discipleship outcomes.
- The number of programs is minimized in order to focus the church's ministry on and through the discipleship process.
- All teaching in the church, from Sunday morning classes for elementary school children through the worship service and other adult teaching venues, is substantively coordinated.
- The church's mission statement serves as a practical tool for identifying necessary ministry outcomes that are tied to an annually updated series of goals that directly relate to the mission statement and to the spiritual state of the congregation.

WHY CONGREGATIONS DO POORLY

Barna lists the following as some of the reasons evangelicals are doing poorly in developing their people:

1. Few churches or Christians have a clear, measurable definition of "Spiritual Success."
2. We've defined "Discipleship" as head knowledge, rather than complete transformation.
3. We've chosen to teach people in random rather than systematic ways.
4. There's virtually no accountability for what we say, think, do, or believe.
5. When it comes to discipleship, we promote programs rather than people.
6. The primary method that churches rely on for spiritual development (small groups) typically fails to provide comprehensive spiritual nurture.
7. Church leaders aren't zealous about the spiritual development of people.
8. We invest our resources in adults rather than in children.
9. We divert our best leaders to ministries other than discipleship.

WHAT MAKES CHURCHES EFFECTIVE AT DISCIPLE-MAKING

Barna's research showed that "a church engaged in effective discipleship is a church that will grow steadily and solidly." In addition, the research demonstrated how churches can correct the nine flaws above.

Every church doing well did a few of the following nine things well.

1. The leaders had passion for making disciples.
2. Depth: Personal growth and spiritual reproduction were one and the same.
3. Maturity: The end product was for a person to reach his or her highest earthly potential in Christ.
4. Practice: The repeated acting of the will created habits and therefore, character.
5. Process: Discipleship is not a destination but a journey. The process is lifelong and one must be patient.
6. Interactive: Discipleship is done in community, not in isolation.
7. Multifaceted: The process incorporates a variety of thrusts toward building us up in Christ.
8. Lifelong: Every day of life for all of life. Don't think program, trust the process.
9. Christ-like: The marker is Jesus, being formed into his image; all else is a waste of effort.

While the research reveals nine things that leaders or churches are doing right or wrong, rarely (almost never in fact) are any leaders or churches doing all the listed things. They usually have five or six out of nine of the characteristics – good or bad – so please keep that in mind as you handle the data.