



DISCIPLE OTHERS

Source: Tony Shepherd

(<https://www.9marks.org/article/disciple-others/>)



During eight years of pastoral ministry, few things have amazed me more than witnessing conversion. Seeing someone who was once spiritually dead come to life, turn away from their sin, and turn to Christ in faith—it's a wonder to behold! But another wonder I love to see is the gradual transformation of a believer as he or she becomes more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit ([2 Cor. 3:18](#)).

This process of sanctification continues until we see Jesus face-to-face, and it's often spurred on by discipling relationships. Discipling is one of those words that gets thrown around a lot. But it simply means deliberately helping one another to grow in conformity to Jesus. Discipling is deliberate because it seeks to help specific individuals grow in specific ways toward godliness. Discipling is mutual because it's not a one-way street with a sage on one corner and a student on the other. Every Christian needs spiritual formation, and every Christian is equipped by the Spirit to build one another up ([Jude 1:20](#); [Eph. 4:12](#); [1 Peter 2:5](#)). So discipling one another should be normal.

Now let's spend a little time thinking about the why, the who, and the how.

THE WHY?

I'll pick three reasons and elaborate on one.

1. Reason #1: We should disciple one another simply because Jesus commands it.

Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples in [Matthew 28](#). That answer alone should be sufficient.



2. Reason #2: We should disciple one another because we care about personal holiness.

Christians are new creatures with old habits. We need to help one another break the old habits of our old man and pick up new habits that match our new identity as children of God. Discipling one another is an effective means to that end.

3. Reason #3: We should disciple one another because we care about our witness to the world.

In other words, our discipling is actually connected to the global advance of the gospel!

All authority in heaven and on earth is given to King Jesus so that every nation can hear the good news of the gospel and submit to the King ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)). That's what we want—the nations to submit to King Jesus through faith in King Jesus.

What's Jesus' game-plan for this? It's not "Go, therefore, and make converts"; that's a one-time event. It's "Go, therefore, and make disciples"; that's a lifelong process! That's how long it takes to teach these converts how to observe all that the Lord has commanded his people. The spread of the gospel throughout the world will happen as we obey this call to "make disciples."

THE WHO?

In theory, any professing believer is a candidate for discipling. We cannot disciple unbelievers because they do not have the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)). We should evangelize such people.

But notice that I said, "in theory." While any professing believer is a candidate for discipling, we are all limited creatures. We can only be in one place at one time, and we cannot be expected to disciple the entire world—or even your entire church.

Speaking of the church, that's where discipling gets particular. You and your fellow church members have agreed to the same doctrine, are submitting to the same process of spiritual formation (preaching and shepherding), and have committed to love and walk with the same people.

In our churches, we remind each other that our membership directory is the second most important book after the Bible. The Bible tells us how to disciple one another, but the membership directory reminds us who we should deliberately disciple. The members of your own local church should be the primary recipients of your discipling effort, as you should be the primary recipient of their discipling effort.

When every member is seeking to grow in grace together, we live out the reality of what Paul says in Ephesians 4:

"We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." - Ephesians 4:15-16

I don't mean to say you can't disciple people who go to another church. I simply want to say that the best and most natural discipling relationships will happen inside the local church.



THE HOW?

Before you say discipling is too hard, I want to leave you with five quick and practical pieces of advice.

1. Pray

Pray that God would give you a heart that's receptive and bold. Pray that God would lead you to the person or people that you should intentionally grow with in this season.

2. Be intentional (Part 1)

Don't suffer from paralysis analysis. Choose a person or two of the same gender and ask them if you could meet on some regular basis to read God's Word, pray together, and hold each other accountable to what you are reading.

3. Be intentional (Part 2)

Sometimes, we'll have discipling relationships with people in similar stages of life or with similar life experiences. That's okay. But don't only seek out people who are like you. The gospel unites radically different people into one body, and our discipling relationships should reflect the gospel's power to bring radically different people together. Younger men and older men should pair up. Older women and younger women should pair up. Black people and white people and everything in between should pair up. Seek to enter into one another's lives, especially those who are not like you.

4. Learn one another's story

As you begin a discipling relationship, make sure you know the people around the table. Know their stories. Be a good listener. And be as honest about yourself as wisdom allows. Discipling requires speaking the truth in love, but speaking the truth in love requires that two people know each other enough to be accurate and love each other enough to be genuine.

5. Live life together

Discipling isn't only about the books we read, or the times we pray. Discipling is also about the battles we fight. So serve the Lord together. If you're single, fold others into your life. If you're married, fold other couples or singles into your life. Spend time together. Hang out. When you do, you'll find many opportunities to experience the ups and downs of life.

Here's the main idea: live life together and keep God's Word at the center. Don't relegate discipling to a one-hour Zoom call. Instead, follow Jesus in real-time as a family. There may be seasons of time where meeting once-a-week for an hour works best. There may be seasons where the only margin you have is to include someone in the routines of your life (I'm thinking of young moms). The goal isn't that we develop an air-tight system. The goal is to love one another as you point each other to God's Word and the power of the gospel. The goal, in a word, is Christ-likeness.

CONCLUSION

You don't need to be a disciple-making guru. You just need to be available. You don't need to be a theologian. You just need to be a means of grace to other disciples.

Disciple-making is for everyday, blood-bought, imperfect followers of Jesus. So, Christian, let's commit to disciple one another!