

HOW TO START MAKING DISCIPLES?

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

A disciple is more than an admirer, a fan, or a student. A disciple learns from his master to become like his Master and live by his teachings. A fan or an admirer loves the teacher, cheers at his instruction, knows everything about him, but does not do what the teacher does. It is just like a soccer fan that shouts of joy when his team scores a goal, while he does not even play soccer himself. A student has a different kind of relationship to his teacher. He might not necessarily love the teacher nor imitate his lifestyle; he just needs the information of the teacher's field of expertise to reach his own personal goals or to follow his own agenda. A disciple, on the other hand, knows the teacher, loves the teacher, learns what the teacher teaches, and lives by those teachings. His teacher's agenda becomes his own, and he longs to become like him.

In the days when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, He spoke in many occasions about who could be counted as worthy of being His disciple, the price that it cost to become one, and the mission that His disciples had to fulfill. That's why the Lord didn't take any random person as disciple, nor invited everyone to be his disciples. He carefully chose few men, after intense prayer and getting to know them at a personal level. On that basis, He rejected many as well who did want to follow Him! He healed everyone that came to Him, set them free from demons when necessary, taught a lot to the large crowds, but He trained only a small group of people. The Lord Jesus, the Master Disciple-Maker, took three years to raise up His disciples from spiritual babies to mature and fruitful individuals.

ONE-TO-ONE DISCIPLESHIP

First of all, we need to be aware that all the disciples we will train are not ours, nor our organization's or institution's, but Jesus'. The bible states it quite clearly:

*Juan 21:15-17 → Then when they broke fast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, **Feed My lambs**. He said to him the second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, **Feed My sheep**. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? Peter was grieved because He said to him a third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, **Feed My sheep**.*

*Acts 20:28 → Therefore take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **feed the church of God** which He has purchased with His own blood.*

*1 Peter 5:1-2 → I exhort the elders who are among you, I being also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. **Feed the flock of God among you**, taking the oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly; nor for base gain, but readily;*

The bible is very clear that the flock is God's, not ours, our pastor's, or our congregation's. Furthermore, the apostle Paul never called anyone he trained "his" disciple, but his children (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:22; 1 Timothy 1:2; etc.), brothers (2 Corinthians 1:1; 2:13; etc.), partner, fellow-worker, etc.

Therefore, let's keep in mind that when we disciple anyone, we are teaching and training them to be imitators of Christ, and that we should live in such a way that when they imitate us, they imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1; Eph 5:1; Phi 3:17; Heb 6:12; etc.)

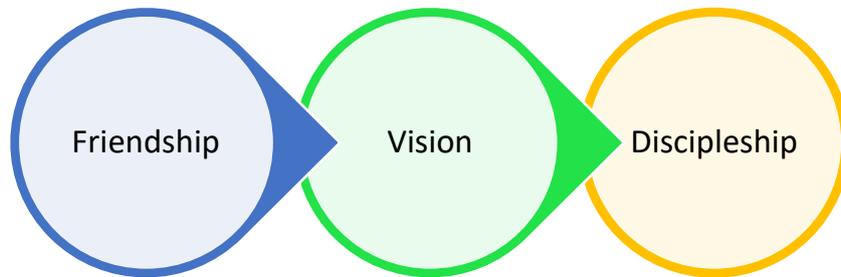
Now let's get more practical. In all we will discover here, we need to look at the Lord Jesus as our primary source of doctrine and example.

In the bible it is very clear that the Lord knew his disciples before he called them to follow Him. What he did with them is not described in Scripture, but we do see that a relationship existed. Later, after he had been preaching

for a while, He called them and they trusted and followed Him. They left everything behind for Jesus because they knew Him well, they trusted Him, and considered the calling worth of the sacrifice.

To trust anyone requires time and relationship. Requires seeing how a person is in different aspects of life, how he is in secret, and seeing the fruit of his walk. Requires seeing how the person reacts to difficult situations in life, and seeing this person consistently faithful to his own words. The disciples obviously trusted Jesus, to the point of giving their lives for Him, but we see that this process took time as well to get that deep.

So, when I speak about discipling someone as a follower of Jesus, I consider the following order of work:



FRIENDSHIP: the focus is on first building a relationship of trust in which it becomes clear that the needs of the “little one” can be satisfied by our experience with the Lord and understanding of Scripture.

VISION: after spending enough time together it becomes clear that we have something to give that the babies need. Then we sow a vision for spiritual growth, that will be explained at full length later. What I mean by “sowing a vision” is simply to explain to him from a biblical perspective that God wants him to grow all the way to a mature spiritual father, capable to live out the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) and to operate in the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12-14), building up the church in different ministries (Eph 4:1-16) and bearing fruit of life, repentance, and multiplication.

DISCIPLESHIP: if there is trust in the relationship, and both parties (the new disciple and the disciple-maker) agree on it, after consulting the Lord in prayer, then starts a process of one-to-one discipleship. I would recommend this process to have a commitment for a relatively short period of time, like a month or 6 weeks in which both can test if working like this helps the disciple to grow and develop spiritually.

GOALS AND CONTENT OF THE TRAINING

Here I would like to share a rough reference of the characteristics of each spiritual-age group and a recommended route to follow with them in their training. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the theory does not usually meet the reality. Please be sensitive to the work the Holy Spirit is doing in them, and cooperate with Him.

This list would be an ideal path for a sinner without or with very little/shallow religious background. Nonetheless, if you get the chance to disciple someone who has already had religious formation it would be good anyway to review the basic points, and not assume he understands things the same way just because he confesses it to be so. Many disciples we will train will be a mix of spiritual ages, since the current main-stream church system produces Christians that are too strong in some areas while very weak in other ones. Some will be strong in practical areas but with a very weak character or discipline, while others the other way around.

Another key point to the training of disciples is shepherding. Remember that discipleship is not only knowledge, but it is actually obedience. Knowledge is necessary for obedience, because we all need to know what laws we are to obey, but it is not the only thing necessary. We need freedom from sin and hurts. So, take time to talk to your disciples, and not only have a “business-like relationship.” Spend good quantity and not only quality time together, actively trying to help them with their sins and weaknesses.

So here the recommended list of goals and training for each spiritual level of maturity in discipleship.

a) For babies

The goal of discipling a baby is first of all **survival** and reaching a **level of stability**, overcoming the fiery darts of the enemy to choke off his faith through sin and false teachings.

Keeping this in mind, we first need to consider the Holy Spirit's agenda. What I mean by that is that the Holy Spirit will be awakening the awareness of the disciple to particular areas in his life that demand immediate attention, through curiosity or frustration. When the disciple himself has practical questions or needs help to understand certain situations, that becomes an area of work for the disciple maker.

When discipling someone we will see that some of his weak areas are closed to correction or instruction, and that only some areas are open. We can easily find out the open areas by the questions the disciple asks. I would give priority to follow the areas of hunger and need in him, in combination with what we know is important for him to learn at this stage. We have of course a recommended route, but that is just that, a recommendation.

A list of suggested basic topics is:

1. The red thread of the Bible: God's original plan for man and earth, the fall in sin, the attempts of God to save man, His judgement, His salvation plan: Abraham, Israel, the Messiah, the church, Jesus' reign on earth, the new Jerusalem and new earth. A good way to do it is just reading the main Bible stories together, and through them see how God dealt with men through history.
2. Relationship with God: understanding first our position as redeemed sinners, adopted by God. What does it mean to be a child? What inheritance are we to receive? What are the conditions to remain in Him? Then also how to have fellowship with the Father, in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit: prayer, fasting, discerning the Holy Spirit.
3. If applicable, an introduction to practical areas: he could join us when evangelizing, setting people free, baptizing, etc. only if he likes and wants it. It's important that he does not take on his own the responsibility to do this alone yet, unless the Lord sets it up that way.

b) For youngsters

We can recognize a youngster by their stability and radical passion for Jesus. They are ready with the milk, they are now eating solid biblical food and stepping out in action. Their flesh is under control, they do not fall in sin, they discern doctrinal lies up to a point, they read and understand the Word of God. Their main weakness is a lack of wisdom, manifesting through attitudes like being judgmental towards other brothers and sisters, or way too harsh with sinners such as their unbelieving family. Sometimes a lot of guilt about "not doing as much as they could," or as much as "they think they should."

A youngster, nonetheless, has all the potential to reproduce, just like a teenager. Teenagers are biologically developed enough to conceive and give birth, but they are not mentally mature to raise up children or sustain a family. They could be able to roughly do it, but it is not the natural order in which it was intended to be since they are not mentally mature yet. This picture of natural family-bearing development is an almost perfect picture of discipleship.

1. Topics for bible study would be the following:
2. The person and commandments of Jesus: discovering who Jesus was, what was His agenda, feelings, priorities, His heart, His relationship with His disciples, His plan for the church and the role of the Holy Spirit in the church are vital. Also, how he dealt with sinners, and the authority He gave us to work in His name. This could be achieved by conducting discovery bible studies reading through the gospel of Mark.
3. The church: there is so much confusion in the Christian world about this topic. As a youngster, the disciple will have probably reached a level in which he shares his beliefs and is interested in what other people believe as well, so unavoidably he will meet people with different religious backgrounds with many different ideas about church and ministry. Doing DBSs from the book of Acts will give him a good insight of what the church was like and why we do what we do.
4. Specific topics according to his need: he will have very specific battles and needs. He will need that you intentionally ask him how he is doing, where he is spiritually stuck or battling, and instead of just giving advice, you can help him discover with the Word what is God's will and way to overcome and grow.

5. In the practical area, he should not just look but start getting involved. He should have freedom to take action on what God puts in his heart with your help and supervision. As a babe he would watch and help, here he helps and takes action, while you watch and give feedback.

It is very important to remember that this is the season that will bring him to a spiritual parenthood, so investing in his character building (fruit of the Spirit, as in Galatians 5) and qualities as the ones mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus should be done here.

c) For fathers

A disciple can be considered a father not when they have a long time in the faith, or when they have the same convictions than us, nor when they are talented and gifted, but when they have developed a solid character of humility and servanthood, when they do not seek to outstand the rest, and when they genuinely care more about the spiritual health and development of others. Further, they want and are able to share their faith effectively and lovingly with others, and they can be good team workers with the rest of the church.

When someone reaches this level of maturity, he should be helped to “move out of the parents’ home,” not kicked out onto the streets. He might not need any more bible studies with us, but more practical support and guidance in setting up their own spiritual families.