

WHAT IS DISCIPLING?

Discipleship Message #5

We started a new church with the purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him (now and) forever.

- We've seen in the Bible that we glorify God and enjoy Him forever when we live according to His plan and purpose—when we live for the “mission”: To be and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This purpose and mission have led us into a short Bible study on discipleship: We've learned that...

- A *disciple* is a Christian (the terms are synonymous in the Book of Acts).
 - ✓ A disciple is one who has passed through “strait gate” of *conversion* (a disciple is made/created through the work of evangelism which results in *repentance* and *faith* in the Jesus Christ).
 - ✓ A disciple is one who is now walking on the “narrow path” of *consecration* (a disciple is made/molded into the image of Christ through edification: learning and applying Scripture)
- *Discipleship* is the process a disciple goes through as he is conformed to the image of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 6.40 cf. Rom 8.29).
 - ✓ Therefore, discipleship is the normal Christian life. It implies conversion and a life-long process of growing in Christ-likeness.
 - ✓ Discipleship simply means to follow Jesus in order to become like Him in character and conduct.

There is one more term we need to define in our study: *Discipling*.

- Since we already understand *disciple* and *discipleship*, this new term will not be hard to understand.
- However, in addition to learning *what* *discipling* is, we need to also understand what the Bible says about *who* is responsible for it (the answer is simple: Every disciple is responsible for discipling).
- We will be reviewing many of the principals and passages we've looked at before, but it's necessary in order to tie up some loose ends and move on to the next part of our study on discipleship.

I. Discipling: What is it?

A. *Discipling* refers to one's participation in the process of discipleship.

1. *Discipling* is a verb we invented from the terms and concepts surrounding *disciple* and *discipleship*.
2. We use the verb (*discipling*) most often to refer to helping another grow as a disciple of the Lord, but it refers to the entire work of discipleship—to both aspects of “making disciples.”

B. There are two main components in *discipling*: Evangelism and Edification

1. It is *both* evangelism and edification, not only edification (as many teach these days).
2. Through *evangelism* we make a disciple in the sense of “create” (it's how a lost person *becomes* a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ).
3. Through *edification* we make a disciple in the sense of “mold” (it's how a saved person *grows* as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ).
 - a) (Luke 6.40) The goal of discipleship is for the disciple to become as the Master.
 - b) (Rom 8.29) Since that very same goal is the goal for *all* Christians, we can safely say that discipleship is for all believers, not just for a few, select, super-spiritual Bible students.
4. To add one more term (for future reference): *Missions* is simply “copy-paste” (we take what we are doing here to be and make disciples, and we copy it and paste it in another geographic location).

C. Review: If *discipling* simply refers to the work of discipleship (making disciples: evangelism and edification), then who is responsible for it?

II. Discipling: Who is responsible for it?

A. “Being” a disciple: Who is responsible for it?

1. This needs to be stated clearly so that we avoid problems and misunderstanding later on.
2. You are responsible for discipling in your own life; you are responsible for being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a) When Jesus issued His call to “follow me,” not one of His Twelve disciples could point at another and say, “I failed because of him... because he did not do what I expected or needed.”
 - b) You are not my disciple and I am not your disciple. We are all disciples of the Lord.
 - c) Therefore, ultimately, I am not responsible for you and you are not responsible for me. We are all responsible individually before the Lord to follow Him.
3. Granted, God has called believers to help other believers grow in their faith (that's what the church is here for), but they are not responsible for your lack of diligence in following the Lord.
 - a) Please don't point the character defects of others (your pastor or other disciples helping in this church) and say that you have not grown in Christ because of them.
 - b) Ultimately, the Lord has call you individually to follow Him and, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will ask you to give an account of your efforts to do that. There will be no blaming others for our decisions then then; therefore I don't think we should be blaming others now.
4. We all have access to the Scripture. We all have the Spirit of God in us. We all have the opportunity to gather together with other saints. We have all we need to grow in Christ.
 - a) What we want to do here at Harvest Baptist Church is create an environment where we not only grow in Christ, but where we can grow a lot and thrive in Christ.
 - b) But that means each and every one of us needs to be responsible, and then we help each other.
 - c) Pastoral exhortation: Please don't blame me (or anyone else) and my character defects for your lack of growth. I'm not perfect, but you are not (ultimately) following me. Follow Christ. I will do my best (according to my gifts, calling, and personality) to help you. But I'm not the Lord.

B. “Making” disciples: Who is responsible for it?

1. If we “make” disciples through evangelism and edification, who is responsible for *discipling*?
 - a) (1Cor 3.6) Obviously, God is ultimately responsible for making a disciple. He gives the increase in our evangelistic efforts (saving people) and He gives the increase in our efforts to edify other believers (sanctification).
 - b) But, just as obvious is the fact that He has given us a part to play in the work of making disciples, and that's what we want to focus on.
2. (2Cor 5.18-20) Obviously, every disciple (reconciled one) is expected by his Lord to be responsible in the work of *evangelism*: taking the word of reconciliation to the lost to “make” disciples.
 - a) If you don't know how to do that or if your are intimidated by evangelism, stick around.
 - b) We will be teaching a lot about what the Bible says about evangelism, then we'll have practical training courses on evangelism, and we'll even let you get hands-on experience evangelizing.
3. Every disciple (every saved believer) is also expected by his Lord to participate in the work of *edifying* other believers in the Body of Christ.
 - a) (Eph 2.8-9) If you are saved, God has created you in Christ for good works that He expects you to walk in (to live in, to do constantly and consistently).
 - b) (Eph 4.11-12) Those good works are the works which result in edification.
 - (1) (Eph 4.13) *Edification* is the perfecting process of becoming like Jesus Christ (it refers to the process of being conformed to the image of Christ).
 - (2) (Eph 4.14) *Edification* is the spiritual growth process through which an immature believer become a more mature, responsible Christian (an “adult”).

- c) (Eph 4.15) *Edification* (spiritual growth, perfection, maturation) takes place when we speaking the truth in love.
- (1) We help other believers grow in Christ (edification) by speaking the truth to them in love.
 - (2) (2Tim 3.16-17) We minister the Word of God to them with a genuine desire to see them grow in Christ, trust in Christ, and glorifying God in Christ (that's Christian love).
- d) (Eph 4.16) *Edification* is the responsibility of every member of the Body. We participate together in the ministry of the Word to other, in love (just as all the members of the human body, which are different but united in purpose and mission, work together).
- e) (1Cor 14.26) That's why everything that each and every member does in the congregation (in the church) is to be for edification. That's our mission; that's the reason the church is here.
4. Edification (ministering the Word to other believers in love) can take many different forms.
- a) Here is another thing that needs to be said so we avoid misunderstandings later on.
 - b) All of us (individually and as a local church) have been called by the Lord to edifying other believers by ministering the Word to them—by teaching them the Word and helping them to apply it to their daily lives.
 - (1) That can look just as simple as this:
 - (a) Get together with another believer, read the Scripture and talk about...
 - i) What the passage says (observation),
 - ii) What the passage means (interpretation), and
 - iii) What the passage implies (application).
 - (b) Then you pray together and that's it. Simple. It doesn't have to be complicated.
 - (2) But edification can be “complicated” if that's a better fit to how God has made you.
 - (a) You can develop a three-year, structured, written, academic course of study that will help other believers grow in knowledge of the Word and, through application exercises, help them to also apply the knowledge they are obtaining.
 - (b) Edification does not have to be complicated, but it can be if that's how you're wired.
 - (3) There is room in the ministry for everyone, from the simple fisherman (Peter, James, John), who ministered the Word to others, to the vocational theologian (Paul).
 - (a) And there is room for anyone and everyone in between. No one is excluded
 - (b) If my style is too “academic” for you, don't worry. Your style is probably not “academic” enough for me. Different is not wrong.
 - (c) If you disciple differently than I do, that's okay. If I disciple differently than you do, that's okay, too. Different is not wrong.
 - (d) We need that difference in order to build well-rounded disciples, and that's why discipling is to be done in the local church. Disciples need exposure to a variety of other disciples—each member of the Body participates in the edification process.
 - (4) Pastoral exhortation: Please think twice before criticizing another believer just because he is not like you, or because he doesn't do the work of the ministry exactly like you.
 - (a) (1Cor 12.18) God has set each and every one of the members of the Body of Christ exactly where it pleased Him.
 - (b) I have a more academic approach to edification. You might be more relational. One is not wrong and the other right. Both are good and needed!
 - (c) So, let's think twice (and hold our tongues) when we feel the need to point at someone else who is different than us and criticize him in the ministry. Maybe God made that person the way he is for a purpose (to do a specific work in the Body that requires that person to be the way he is).

5. Different is not wrong. We are all called to make disciples, and we will all do it a little differently.
 - a) Our evangelism styles will be different, but we all need to get the Gospel to the lost.
 - b) Our edification styles will be different, but we all need to speak the truth in love to other believers in order to help them grow in the knowledge and application of Scripture.

III. **Discipling: What's the problem?**

- Before we conclude, we need to mention a very real danger in *discipling* in order to try to avoid it.

A. **The danger in discipling: “Institutionalism”**

1. This refers to the problem of programs and materials taking the place of actual discipling.
2. The danger is to get our eyes off the biblical process of growing in Christ-likeness (in character and conduct) and focusing rather on classes, courses, books, materials, and knowledge alone.
3. When this happens, the *means to the end* (the techniques and the tools) become *the end themselves*, and discipling stops (no real spiritual growth occurs).
 - *Discipleship* and *discipling* become a program or a set of books or courses, and disciples are those really dedicated, super-spiritual people who read the books and take the courses.
4. How can we avoid letting our focus on *biblical discipleship* degenerate into *institutional discipleship*? I think the answer lies in a biblical “philosophy” of discipleship...

B. **Avoiding the danger in discipling: Focus on the “Philosophy”**

1. Let's define our terms before talk about “discipleship philosophy”:
 - a) We have just finished a study on the *biblical theology* of discipleship.
 - (1) That means we studied what the Bible says about discipleship.
 - (2) We went to the Scripture and observed passages in their proper context in order to define the *terms* and *concepts* associated with discipleship.
 - b) Our next step is to develop a *biblical philosophy* of discipleship.
 - (1) It's still “biblical” so we are still going to be studying the Bible (not man's philosophies).
 - (2) But, a “philosophy” of discipleship refers to the *how* of discipling: How does it happen and how we do it? This will focus mostly on biblical *principals* rather than on programs.
 - c) Once we have a biblical philosophy of discipleship established, then (and only then) should we talk about the *biblical practice* of discipleship.
 - (1) Here is where we talk about techniques and tools, plans and programs.
 - (2) However, even when we are “practicing” biblical discipleship, our focus must *always* be on the philosophy (the biblical principals), and not on the programs and the tools.
 - (a) If one tool works well for you in evangelism, use it! If I find another that works better for me, fantastic. But, the goal is to evangelize biblically.
 - (b) If one tool (or technique: one-on-one, for example) works well for you in edifying other believers, great! But, if something different works for me (classroom teaching or small groups), don't criticize. The goal is to biblically edify other believers and that can take many forms (all of which can be right, biblical, and profitable).
2. A biblical philosophy of discipleship must include both evangelism and edification.
 - a) A biblical philosophy of evangelism.
 - (1) What are the biblical principals we need to understand about how evangelism happens?
 - (2) The *means* God uses to make (create) a disciple—the biblical means of evangelism (the process of how God makes a disciple of Jesus Christ from a sinner).

- (a) The Personal Conviction of the Sinner (e.g., Acts 9.5, the “pricks” of the ox goad).
 - (b) The Preaching of the Cross (the special revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ)
 - (c) The Regeneration of the Spirit: You must be born again; if not, you are not a disciple.
- (3) Our **goals** in striving to make (create) a disciple—the biblical goals of evangelism (what's our part in making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ from sinners).
- (a) There are three main goals in our efforts to evangelize the lost (and they can be illustrated easily by using an agricultural metaphor: Wheat).
 - (b) **Go:** We need to go out into the field (out into the world to seek the lost).
 - (c) **Sow:** We need to sow the seed of the Gospel in the field (in the hearts of sinners)
 - (d) **Water:** We need to return to the field and tend it.

b) A biblical philosophy of edification.

- (1) What are the biblical principals we need to understand about how edification happens?
 - (2) The **means** God uses to make (conform) disciples—the biblical means of edification (the process of how God makes a mature disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ).
 - (a) Identification with Christ – Identify with Christ
 - (b) Knowledge of the Bible – Learn the Bible
 - (c) Obedience to the Bible – Obey the Bible
 - (d) Suffering – Endure Suffering
 - (e) An Exchanged Life – Live an Exchanged Life
 - (3) Our **goals** in striving to make (conform) disciples—the biblical goals of edification (what's our part in making mature disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ?).
 - (a) Commitment to the Word of God
 - (b) Commitment to the Local Church
 - (c) Commitment to the Fellowship with Other Christians
 - (d) Commitment to Ministry
- c) If we focus on the **biblical philosophy** of discipleship (the principles: the means and, especially, the goals), we can avoid the dangers of institutionalism.

Conclusion:

At this point we can now clearly define and understand the terms and concepts of discipleship:

1. A **disciple** is a Christian (the two terms are synonymous; they refer to the same thing: a saved sinner).
2. **Discipleship** is the process by which a sinner is conformed to the image of Christ (Luke 6.40 cf. Rom 8.29).
3. **Discipling** refers to the work of discipleship—of making disciples. It describes our participation in discipleship.
4. The **goal** of discipleship is Christ-likeness: To be like Christ (Luke 6.40 cf. Rom 8.29).
5. Discipleship, therefore, is the **ministry** of the Church and of this church (Eph 4.11-16 cf. 1Cor 14.26)