

What is Discipling, and Why Disciple or Be Discipled?

We all desire Grace to be a church family where the members are growing “up in everywhere into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Personal discipling relationships are critical for our spiritual growth as Christians and for making God’s glory visible in our life together as a church. **So, how do people grow?**

Consider this analogy: The human body contains 78 organs that belong to one of ten body systems. These body systems are interconnected and dependent upon one another to function. **For instance, your skeletal system relies on the nutrients it gains from your digestive system to build strong, healthy bones. Then, your bones and muscles work together to support and move your body. They also protect your respiratory system, which takes in oxygen from the air dispersed in the body through a circulatory system beginning with the heart. Your heart does not beat unless your brain and nervous system tell it to do so. Each of your body systems relies on the others to work well.**

The same is true with the Body of Christ. Christ, the head, gives life to his Body. Church members are the body parts, and they are interconnected and dependent upon the ministries of one another to function. When every member part is working together, the body can grow and function as Christ intended. **Christ grows the church by commissioning every member to contribute to discipling one another. This class will ask and answer, “What is discipling, and why disciple or be disciplined?”**

First, let’s consider the need for mutual discipleship. Turn to Ephesians 4:15:
“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from 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.” Let’s examine this together. **Ask: What is Paul teaching in these verses?**

Paul challenges us to keep growing! *“we are to grow up into him in every way.”* We must continuously pursue growth. There is more of the fullness of Christ to be had! Amazingly, the “we” in 4:15 included the Apostle Paul himself! No matter how long you have walked with Christ, you have not arrived! Pursue growth. **Ask: How should we pursue growth?**

Paul says we pursue growth by ¹⁵ *speaking the truth in love.*” As **our physical bodies** require us to eat food to grow, our spiritual lives necessitate hearing and speaking the truth. What is “**the truth?**” Look at Ephesians 1:13: *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him.”* The word of truth is “*the gospel*” that presents Christ (“*in him*”). **To speak the truth is to speak Christ.**

More precisely, we speak Christ when we speak his Word in love. The content and the character of our speech must manifest the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. **We pursue growth by taking responsibility for speaking the truth in love to one another and inviting others to speak the truth in love to us.** **Ask: Where does this growth come from?**

Personal and church growth come from Christ: *“Christ... ¹⁶ makes the body grow.”* **How does he do it?** He supplies the body with joints: *“¹⁶ joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly.”* In other words, through one another. **Building one another up is the ministry of every member.** As we speak the truth in love so that we may build ourselves up in love: *“so that it builds itself up in love.”*

Second, what is discipling? Let’s go to the Bible for the answer. **Based on what we see in this passage, what does it mean to follow Jesus?**

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18–20)

Jesus’s followers are to obey all his commands, including this command to make disciples.

Disciples of Jesus make other disciples of Jesus. **In other words, followers of Jesus help others follow Jesus** (Write “Helping others to follow Jesus” on the whiteboard).

Christians must obey God’s command to make disciples and take the initiative to pursue Jesus’ goals for one another. **Turn to Hebrews 10:24:** “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*” Notice that he says “us” and “one another.” He does not reserve spurring on in the Christian life to the pastor. Instead, it is the normative work of God’s people. So, he urges us to “*consider.*” **We must think about it, strategize, and deliberately work toward this purpose. So, discipling others requires taking loving initiative in building relationships. In other words, discipling is INTENTIONAL.** (Write “intentional” on the whiteboard). **What else is involved?**

Turn to Romans 15:14–16: “*I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.*” **Ask:** **What do we see here?** Paul expected all church members *to instruct* each other. He makes this plain in **Colossians 3:16.** **Ask:** **Once “the Word of Christ dwells in us richly,” what does Paul expect us to do for others?** To teach and admonish one another! In Titus 2:3, Paul says the older women are to teach the younger women “*what is good, and so train the young...*”

We have already seen Paul’s explicit instructions in Ephesians 4. We pursue growth by pursuing personal relationships that manifest Christ’s love and speak Christ’s truth. These passages point to this truth: **Each church member should seek to build up others in godliness through teaching God’s Word to them and applying it to their lives.** Believers need personal instruction from God’s word (write “personal instruction from God’s Word” on the whiteboard).

There is one more crucial element to discipling others. **Read 1 Corinthians 11:1** (“*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*”). **Ask: What are Christians told to do? We must imitate godly examples** (write “a person to imitate” on the whiteboard). Following Paul’s example, one should arrange one’s life around helping others come to Christ and grow in Christ.

Read Philippians 3:17 (“*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*”). **Ask: What are Christians told to do?** We must join in imitating Paul and other mature Christians. **We grow through imitating other mature Christians, and their examples show us how to live.**

Notice how **instruction** and **imitation** work together in Philippians 4:19: “*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*” Paul instructed they “*learned*” and “*heard.*” Paul modeled they “*received*” and “*saw.*” The Philippians then “*practice these things*” they received through Paul’s instruction and example. **Formal, informal, corporate, and personal instruction and example setting enable believers to apply God’s Word personally.**

We can now answer the question, what is discipling? *Discipling means intentionally helping others follow Jesus by providing them with personal instruction from God’s Word and being a person for them to imitate.* At its core, making disciples of Christ is helping newer, younger, or less mature believers by practically showing them what it means to follow Jesus in the way outlined in Scripture. God gives us the privilege of discipling others and doing them spiritual good. We also need to continue being mentored and disciplined by others throughout our Christian lives. This idea is sometimes referred to as having a “Paul” (someone to disciple you) and “Timothy” (someone you are discipling) from 2 Timothy 2:2.

Paul chose a few specific, key men like Timothy, whom he trained to lead the churches he helped establish. Timothy would not have been capable of leading a church when they first met. Instead, he learned how to do so from Paul's life and teaching. They studied Scripture, prayed, and fellowshiped together. However, their relationship was more than a teacher-student relationship in a classroom context. Paul brought Timothy into his daily life to model what it meant to be a Christian. This ongoing relationship is the essence of life-on-life discipleship—doing life together so that the more mature believer can train the less mature believer in Christlikeness and Kingdom service.

Finally, Why Disciple? First, for God's glory! Read John 15:9-17:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my **joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete**. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he **lay down his life for his friends**. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything **that I learned from my Father I have made known to you**. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and **bear fruit – fruit that will last**. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus tells us we should love each other as Christ has loved us. Ask: **How has Christ loved us in ways we can replicate to others?** First, He laid his life down for us. Christ would have us spend our lives for others as he did. Ask: **What was he accomplishing for those he had chosen by laying down His life?** (He brings us to Father; we share in the joy of God; that we bear fruit; to complete our joy). We should do this for others!

Second, Christ loves his disciples by making known what he learned from the Father. He taught them the truth about God. You imitate Christ's love by sharing the truth you have learned from God's Word with others.

Why Disciple? Second, for your joy! Paul says in 1 Thess. 2:19-20, “*For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*” God produces joy in you when you help others grow.

Application: Who is one person that you want to see presented fully mature on the day of Christ? Write down their name and when and how you plan to establish/deepen this intentional relationship to train them for godliness. But be sure to ask, who is discipling/mentoring me?