

Discipleship - purpose, principles and practice

Purpose:

Our **purpose** is to teach them to obey everything we have learned ourselves from Jesus – to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the Body may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Principles:

- a) firstly, **no two people will do it the same** – there isn’t a right and wrong way. A lot will depend on your personality, and possibly how you’ve been disciplined yourself.
- b) secondly, it all depends on **who you’re discipling**. What’s required by a new convert differs from what would be needed by a mature Christian. Discipling has to be tailor-made if it’s to be effective.

Practice:

- a) firstly, establish the **relationship**.
- b) secondly **lay good foundations**. We need to establish clear aims and expectations from both sides.
- c) thirdly, begin the **process**:
 - one to one discipling is about **‘discipling in life’**. It deals with overall growth. It’s about personal development; teaching people to live from the source of the Spirit. It’s about co-ordinating gift and character.
 - there are **3 aspects** to the process:
 - 1) firstly, the **transfer** of experience, values and knowledge:
 - o **Spend time together** - the informal/spontaneous discipling opportunity. We learn a lot by observation, and the best way to communicate values is by modelling them.
 - o Then there’s the structured, more **formal discipling time**, maybe weekly, fortnightly or monthly when you sit down together and chat. It’s important as a discipler to be **open and vulnerable**. The more we open up to our disciples, the more they’ll open up to us. We need to share our heart, and our failures, as well as successes. Some people like to do **Bible studies** with their disciples - OK if it’s your gift, but don’t try to be what your not! Just pass on things that have impacted you - articles from magazines, good books, tapes, videos, and so on. **Draw in others** or suggest they talk to someone else. As a discipler, you’ll quickly discover that you haven’t got it all!

2) secondly, encourage and **call forth vision, gift and ministry**:

- o Ensure they have a **clear vision for their lives**. Suggest they write a vision statement. Help them **identify their gifts** (both natural and spiritual), and then provide them with opportunities to exercise them. Ensure they get some **prophetic input**. If they're willing, encourage them to do a **personality profile** - something like Myers Briggs. This helps them understand something about themselves and also gives you some insight. Help them to be realistic about their gifts and calling. Sometimes they can have **unrealistic expectations** – like wanting to be a preacher or leader, when God's given them a gift of hospitality or administration! Be honest with them.

3) and finally, **develop character**:

- o Develop a **teachable spirit**. Being teachable does not mean being a yes man, or stifling questions. Jesus disciples learned a great deal by asking questions. Teachableness is an attitude of heart that says I want to learn, I may question, I may challenge, but in my heart I want to learn. How a person reacts to criticism or correction (which incidentally should always be done in private) is a good guide to a person's teachableness.
- o Encourage a **servant heart** - serving is a good way to develop character. Throughout the scriptures we see the apprentice serving his teacher. Ask them to serve other people, or the church.
- o Help them to confront their **weaknesses** – faithful are the wounds of a friend.
- o Encourage them when they get it **wrong**. The only real mistake is the one you fail to learn from.
- o Teach them how to **handle conflict**, because if there's one thing certain, they'll face this in life.
- o Always show them **respect**. Speak adult to adult. Don't develop a 'Messianic' complex. Don't become a problem solver, otherwise you'll build dependency.
- o Never take away **their responsibility** by giving strong direction. Help them to appraise options, but leave decision making to them – this leads to maturity.
- o **Listen** more than you speak. Act as a sounding board for their ideas and thoughts.
- o Finally **pray** with them.