

10 REASONS WHY WE BELIEVE THAT PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP (SPIRITUAL PARENTING) IS NEEDED, IN ADDITION TO CORPORATE DISCIPLESHIP

1. The generally accepted definition of “discipleship” is distorted –

Generally speaking, in the Christian community the term “discipleship” has become synonymous with “teaching”. Thus anyone who “teaches” is thought by many to be fulfilling the mandate to “make disciples”. Biblical discipleship carries the thought of a deeper interaction between the discipler and the believer being disciplined than that of simply teaching. While teaching is a **crucial component** of the discipleship process, discipleship needs to be understood to comprise other essential components as well. The typical practice of group teaching requires little or no interaction, since many times one person spends an entire session speaking, while others spend the entire session listening. We would not want to imply that there always has to be a dialog between the speaker and listeners. However, for a believer to mature as a disciple (apprentice), he must be given opportunities to express and discuss unique needs and understanding. In other words, discipleship needs to be redefined to comprise the idea of “spiritual parenting”, “spiritual tutoring” or “spiritual mentoring”. The apostle Paul’s example of Biblical discipleship, as described in **Lesson 2-2**, should be compared with the current typical pattern of church practice.

2. There is an attempt to develop “teachers” rather than “disciplers” –

A **by-product** of the common misconception of how to define Biblical Discipleship (point 1. above) is a tendency to focus special attention on believers who seem to have a “gift” for teaching. Since teaching is a **gift of the Spirit***, we must conclude that most believers will not have the gift of teaching. But “discipling” is **not** a gift. Therefore, while we should only expect a **few** believers to become teachers, **almost all** believers should be seen as potential disciplers. If asked, very few believers would say their gift is teaching. Let’s be liberal and say that 10% of believers are gifted in teaching. **Then how are the other 90% supposed to minister?** Many believers if asked would respond by saying their gift is to “serve”, which can mean anything from serving meals at a homeless shelter to painting a widow’s house to innumerable other means of “serving”. By no means do we want to imply that these “services” are not good things. Hopefully it will be seen that we need to redefine “discipleship”. God designed a system of multiplication whereby humans have populated the earth. We think it is sad and unusual if a married couple is incapable of having children, yet there is little surprise in most churches when typical believers are not parenting spiritual children (making disciples). *Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12:28-29, James 3:1

3. To influence many people simultaneously is generally considered the method of choice. Personal one-on-one discipleship appears to be too time-consuming, energy consuming, and inefficient –

The concept we want to demonstrate is that the Biblical method of multiplication is much more productive over the long term. This is very important, because the seeming short-term ineffectiveness has led many to the illusion that it really is not the best method. To be honest, many Christian leaders measure success by numbers. We believe this is one of the reasons there is such an emphasis in the Christian community to hold events and activities, which give the impression of short-term success if attendance is the measure.

Church Growth through Spiritual Multiplication

(rather than “addition”)

| Number of “ CONVERTS ” (1 converted each day) | | Number of “ DISCIPLES ” (1 discipled each 6 months) |
|---|-----------------|---|
| 1 | To start | 1 |
| 183 | ½ year | 2 |
| 365 | 1 year | 4 |
| | | |
| 548 | 1½ years | 8 |
| 730 | 2 years | 16 |
| 913 | 2½ years | 32 |
| 1,095 | 3 years | 64 |
| | | |
| 1,278 | 3½ years | 128 |
| 1,460 | 4 years | 256 |
| 1,643 | 4½ years | 512 |
| 1,825 | 5 years | 1,024 |
| 2,190 | 6 years | 4,096 |
| | | |
| 2,555 | 7 years | 16,384 |
| 2,920 | 8 years | 65,536 |
| 3,285 | 9 years | 262,144 |
| 3,650 | 10 years | 1,048,576 |
| 4,015 | 11 years | 4,194,304 |
| 4,380 | 12 years | 16,777,216 |

The figures in the **left-hand column** represent the number of **converts** that could be attained if a Christian were able to win one person to Christ each and every day of the year. The figures in the **right-hand column** represent the number of fruitful **disciples** that could be attained to if each Christian would be faithful during each 6 month period to disciple just one other new convert to a level of spiritual maturity whereby the newer Christian could be used by the Lord to in turn disciple another convert. The figures in the right-hand column are less impressive at the beginning, but as can be seen, have a much greater long-term benefit.

*The things which you (Timothy) have heard from me (Paul) in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to **faithful** men who will be able to teach **others** also. (2 Tim. 2:2)*

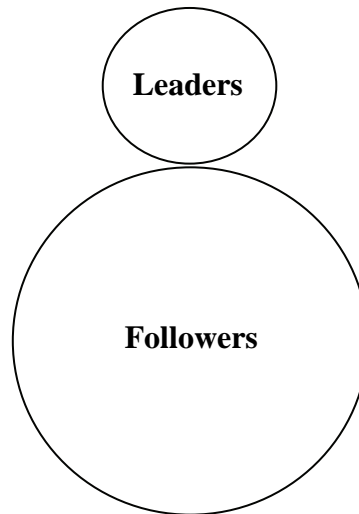
4. Most believers consider themselves inadequately trained, or ungifted –

Leaders are presumed to be trained, but lack the time for personal discipleship; while many followers have the time, but don't feel they're adequately trained.

Typical Church Congregation

Leaders typically are perceived to be “**trained**”, but don't feel they have the necessary **time** to devote to individuals.

Followers usually have more **time**, but don't feel they are adequately **trained** to meet the needs of new believers.



*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the **equipping** of the saints for the **work of service**, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we **all** attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature** man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

***As a result**, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what **every** joint supplies, according to the proper working of **each individual** part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Ephesians 4:11-16

- ✓ **Should it not be the goal of the leaders to see that the typical member of the congregation is equipped and functioning as a fruitful follower of Christ?**
- ✓ **In what capacity should the individual believers be functioning?**
- ✓ **How are we to measure if the saints have been successfully “equipped”?**
- ✓ **Can we claim success if spiritual reproduction is not an end result?**
- ✓ **Should not “personal discipleship” (spiritual reproduction) be the “norm”, rather than the exception? Should we not expect every believer to be in the process of being discipled, or to be actively involved in the spiritual growth of other believers?**

IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT REQUIRED TO DISCIPLE?

MISCONCEPTION: There is a common misconception that the average Christian cannot effectively disciple another Christian unless they are “spiritually gifted”. Is there a scriptural basis for that belief? We think not. Most Christians correctly believe that they should be available to the Lord for the purpose of being a witness to the unsaved, even though there is not a “witnessing” gift. Likewise, there is not a “discipling” gift. This misconception can be a convenient rationale to excuse the lack of discipleship, but it has no scriptural basis. Church leadership ought to convey to congregations that every Christian should be available to the Holy Spirit as a witness and as a discipler.

▶ **God has not intended for every believer to be gifted as an “evangelist”.**

Eph. 4:11 *And He gave ... some as evangelists...*

**But God has intended for every believer to be available to Him as a “witness”!
(not a gift.)**

Matt. 5:16 *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Acts 1:8 *... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses ...*

1 Peter 3:15 *... sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;*

▶ **God has not intended for every believer to be gifted as a “teacher”.**

Eph. 4:11 *And He gave ... some as pastors and teachers,*

Rom. 12:6-8 *Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: ... he who teaches, in his teaching; ...*

**But God has intended for every believer to be available to Him as a “discipler”
(that is, a “spiritual parent”), not a gift.**

1 Thess. 2:7-13 *But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ... exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, ...*

John 12:24-26 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ...*

Matt. 28:18-20 (Command to the Church) *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,*

Both the command to be witnesses, as well as the command to make disciples, were given to the Church at large, not just to those that were present at the time. (Matthew 28:18-20 & Acts 1:8)

5. The practice of mentoring, or spiritual parenting, is not being modeled by many older believers –

The typical newer believer will imitate older believers who they look up to, or with whom they associate. Thus every believer is a role model for other believers, even if they don't want to be.

6. “Personal discipleship” (“spiritual parenting”) is not promoted and modeled from the leadership in many churches –

In 1 Peter 5:1-3 leaders are told, “..., *I exhort the elders among you, ..., shepherd the flock of God among you, ... nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.* Not just telling people what to do, but rather, showing them what to do. Can Christian leaders realistically expect followers to imitate what they themselves are not modeling (by example)?

7. There is an assumption by many that the appropriation of biblical knowledge by itself will lead to spiritual maturity. (See also Lesson 2-2)

8. The church community typically focuses on making converts rather than making disciples –

Jesus, in giving us the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), said to go into all the world and make disciples, not just converts. This then brings up the need to distinguish between a “disciple” and a “non-disciple”. We believe it is true to say that not all believers are disciples, from the Biblical standpoint. What then is a proper definition of the term “disciple”? We believe it will help us to consider a disciple to be an “apprentice”. (See Luke 6:40) (See also Lesson 2-4)

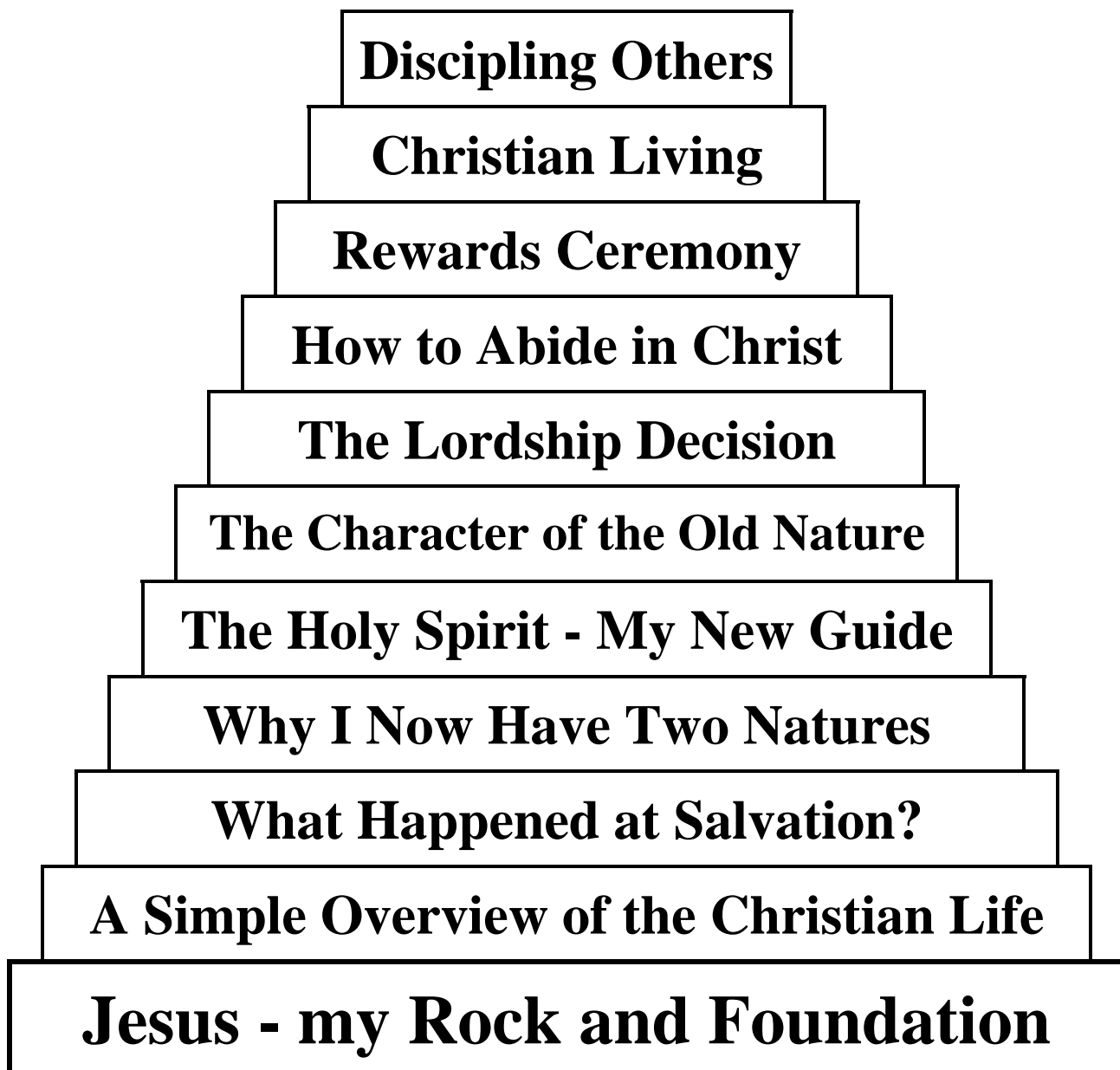
9. Many believers are reluctant to make a commitment that they perceive may interfere with or limit their lifestyle or plans.

10. Biblical truth is often presented in isolated (topical) form without a good understanding of how it fits into the Christian life as a whole, promoting the compartmentalizing of the believer's life –

Imagine that you're about to view a slide presentation of a “project”, a “medical procedure”, or someone's “vacation trip”. You would normally expect such a presentation to begin with an “objective”, or an “overview”, and then proceed in a progressive and sequential manner. But what if the slides were accidentally spilled on the floor, and then put back into the trays in random order. The person doing the presentation would probably be able to explain each individual slide, but would generally have difficulty trying to present a progressive picture. The more complicated the material, and the greater the unfamiliarity of the viewer, the more difficult it would be to try to make sense out of the presentation. Many times the Christian life is presented in a similar random order. Thus the newer believer will probably have a difficult time trying to fit the isolated pieces together in a sensible way. That is why we usually recommend that the discipleship process begin with a visual overview (see Lesson 1-1), followed by a progressive and systematic presentation of what will be encountered by the typical newer believer.

**IT IS HELPFUL TO PROGRESSIVELY PRESENT CONCEPTS IN THE ORDER
IN WHICH THEY ARE TYPICALLY NEEDED BY THE NEW CHRISTIAN**

(Read from bottom to top)



Note: The above sequence is meant to serve as a “guide”, not as a strict order of presentation.

CAUTION: This Lesson is not intended to promote a judgmental attitude, but rather to identify areas of spiritual need, in order to prayerfully seek God’s solutions.