

# 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 include 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 generous 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 of personal discipleship 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 disciplined 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
<b>4,380</b>	<b>12 years</b>	<b>16,777,216</b>

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.

And what you (*Timothy*) have heard from me (*Paul*) in the presence of many witnesses, commit to **faithful men** who will be able to teach **others** also. (2 Tim. 2:2)

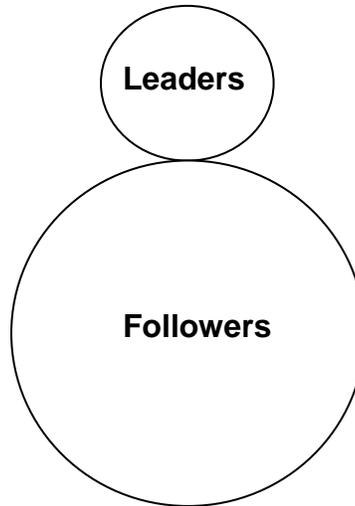
4. Most believers consider themselves inadequately trained, or ungifted.

Leaders are presumed to be trained, but lack the time for personal discipleship. Many followers may have the time, but **don't feel they're adequately trained**. **Who** then is most likely to spiritually parent the new believers?

*Typical Modern 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 personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **for the training** of the saints in the **work of ministry**, to build up the body of Christ, until we **all** reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a **mature** man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.

**Then** we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us **grow** in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by **every** supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of **each individual** part.”

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 reproductive 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 disciplined, 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 personally gave ... **some** evangelists,...

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

Matt. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine **before men**, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My **witnesses** ...

1 Peter 3:15 but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense **to anyone who asks** you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

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

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

Rom. 12:6-8 According to the grace given to us, we have **different gifts**: ... if **teaching**, in teaching;...

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

1 Thess. 2:7-13 ... instead we were gentle among you, **as a nursing mother** nurtures her own children. ... **like a father** with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you ...

John 12:24-26 I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains **by itself**. But if it dies, it produces **a large crop**....

Matt. 28:18-20 (*Command to the Church*) Go, therefore, and **make disciples** of all 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 physically 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 by the leadership in many churches.

In 1 Peter 5:1-3 leaders are told, ... *I exhort the elders among you: Shepherd God's flock among you, ... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being **examples** to the flock.*

Not just tell people what to do, but rather, **show** 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. (This will be covered in greater detail in **Lesson 2-2**)

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

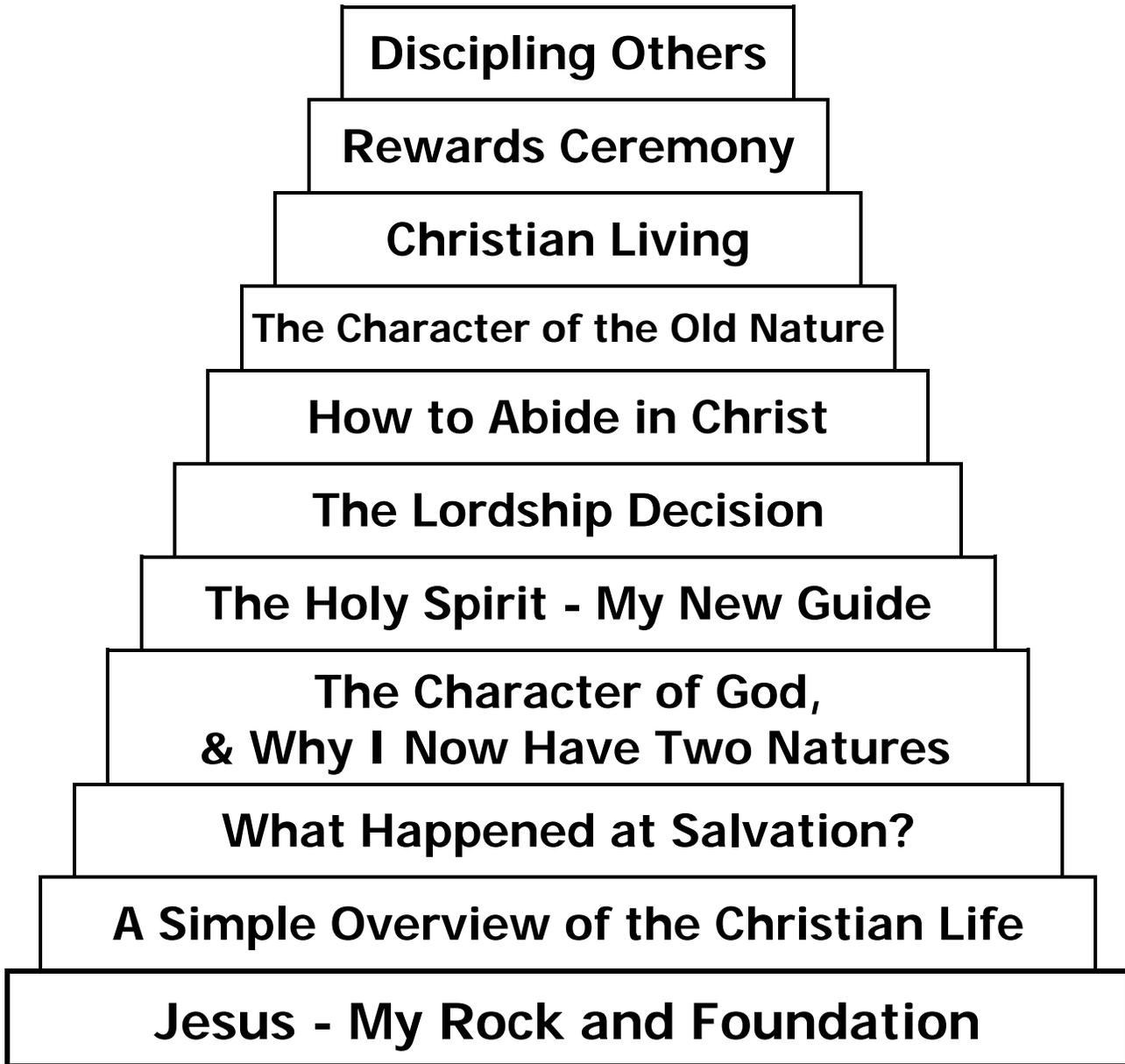
Jesus, in giving us the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), said to go into all the world and make **disciples**, not just converts. This then brings up the need to distinguish between a "disciple" and a "non-disciple". We believe it is true to say that **not all** believers are disciples, from the Biblical 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. This leads to the believer's life becoming compartmentalized.

Imagine that you're about to view a Power Point 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 order of the presentation was "random?" The person making the presentation would probably be able to explain each individual picture, 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:*** *Lesson 2-1 is not intended to promote a critical, or judgmental attitude, but rather to identify areas of spiritual need, in order to prayerfully seek God’s solutions.*