

The Importance of Spiritual Growth: Discipleship

*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. 2Peter 3:18*

The path to spiritual growth is varied and far-reaching. Our journey thus far has led us through an understanding of spiritual growth in the areas of Worship and Ministry. We now undertake the effort to understand and grow spiritually in the area of discipleship. In Discipleship, at one point in time, it was sufficient to know the ideas, the ideals, concepts, precepts and constructs. However, these are simply not enough to grasp the importance of spiritual growth. Now, in this present day, we must incorporate practices, disciplines and regimens as a part of our walk with the Lord. In other words, what we have learned about discipleship must now be what we do. It must become the way we live as a means of Spiritual Growth, which in and of itself indicates its importance. With this in mind, let's begin with the basics from our previous lesson on disciples, and that would be to know who you are as a disciple. Then, we will move to the actions and life of a disciple, that's discipleship.

I. Disciple¹

- (1) The word is found in the Bible only in the Gospels and Acts, and always means the pupil of someone, in contrast to the master or teacher (διδάσκαλος, *didáskalos*). See [Matthew 10:24](#); [Luke 6:40](#). In all cases it implies that the person not only accepts the views of the teacher, but that he is also in practice an adherent. The word has several applications. In the widest sense it refers to those who accept the teachings of anyone, not only in belief but in life. Thus the disciples of John the Baptist ([Matthew 9:14](#); [Luke 7:18](#); [John 3:25](#)); also of the Pharisees ([Matthew 22:15-16](#); [Mark 2:18](#); [Luke 5:33](#)); of Moses ([John 9:28](#)). But its most common use is to designate the adherents of Jesus.
 - (a) In the widest sense ([Matthew 10:42](#); [Luke 6:17](#)). It is the only name for Christ's followers in the Gospels.
 - (b) But especially the Twelve Apostles, even when they are called simply the disciples ([Matthew 10:1](#); [Matthew 11:1](#); [Matthew 12:1](#)). In the Acts, after the death and ascension of Jesus, disciples are those who confess Him as the Messiah, Christians ([Acts 6:1-2, 7](#); [Acts 9:36](#));, "The disciples were called Christians" [Acts 11:26](#)). Even half-instructed believers who had been baptized only with the baptism of John are disciples ([Acts 19:1-4](#)).
- (2) We have also the verb, (Greek word μαθητεύω, pronounced *mathēteúō*, "Jesus' disciple" literally meaning, "was disciplined to Jesus," [Matthew 27:57](#)); "Make disciples of all the nations" (the King James Version "teach," [Matthew 28:19](#)); "had made many disciples" (the King James Version "taught many," [Acts 14:21](#)); "every scribe who hath been made a

¹ —International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

disciple to the kingdom of heaven" (the King James Version "instructed," [Matthew 13:52](#)). The disciple of Christ today may be described in the words of Farrar, as "one who believes His doctrines, rests upon His sacrifice, imbibes His spirit, and imitates His example."

II. Discipleship

To be a disciple of Jesus is an exciting venture. It is to enter into a lifestyle that brings wholeness and fulfillment. It is to maximize our potential, fulfill our destinies and discover our true selves. Discipleship, however, is not always understood in this way. To those outside the church, the word has an archaic ring. In a [culture](#) that values individual [freedom](#), personal truth and unrestricted choice, the whole idea of trusting oneself to another is frightening. Those inside the church are not free from these same reactions. They often equate discipleship with words such as *discipline, obedience, constraint, self-denial, hardship, sacrifice* and *martyrdom*—all words that have negative connotations in a culture given over to self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment. Each of us needs to probe what the word *discipleship* feels like to us. Is the idea of discipleship a burden or a joy to us? What images do we have of disciples? Are these positive or negative? How we answer will affect how we understand and **apply** the precepts of discipleship.

A. Discipleship in the First-Century World (A Biblical Historical Perspective)²

In light of such questions and reactions, it is important to investigate the biblical roots of the concept of discipleship. In the Old Testament, apart from a few references (for example, [1 Chron. 25:8](#); [Isaiah 50:4](#); [Isaiah 54:13](#)), there is little explicit teaching about discipleship. However, it is evident that the relationship between prophets and their followers was often that of master-disciple, even though it is not specifically defined in this way (see [Jeremiah 36:32](#)).

In the New Testament there is abundant discussion of what it means to be a disciple. This is not surprising since discipleship was a common phenomenon in the first-century world. Greek philosophers had disciples, as did the Pharisees, not to mention John the Baptist. The Jews, on occasion, referred to themselves as disciples of Moses. In these relationships, disciples were understood to be individuals committed to a particular person so as to learn that person's teaching or way of life and then to follow a particular pattern of life, whether by living in a certain way, passing on the teaching to others or engaging in political or religious activities. Jesus and his disciples shared this common understanding of the relationship between teacher and disciple. Thus to follow Jesus meant **to do** what Jesus did (replicate his [ministry](#); for example, [Mark 6:7-13](#), [30](#); [Luke 10:1-20](#)) and **to believe** what Jesus taught (obey his word; for example, [John 8:31-32](#); [John 17:6](#)).

The same two characteristics hold true today for those of us who would be Jesus' disciples. *First, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be involved in ministry.* The nature and character of that ministry varies greatly: from voluntary ministry to [tentmaking](#) ministry to ordained ministry. The important point is not what we do but that we understand our task in life to be one of ministry. This will mean that we engage in that task with a consciousness that we are called to it by God, that we seek to honor and serve God in this task and that we exhibit the characteristics of a

² Discipleship, The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity

disciple of Jesus while engaged in our task. *Second*, to be a disciple of Jesus is *to engage in ongoing examination, analysis and application of Scripture*. In this way we come to know who God is, what God requires of us and how to live as God's people. As we go about this task of developing and sharpening our Christian worldview, we will also investigate the whole range of knowledge, understanding that God is the God of truth and that all truth is God's truth.

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The Challenge of Discipleship in the Church of Today...

Progress entails knowledge of the present (where are we now in relation to where we need to be or are trying to get to). In this closing section, it is important that we take a hard and critical look at us, the church, so that our path to living the life of a disciple of Christ is clear, coherent and consistent in being and disciple, while at the same time, making other disciples. The entirety of this effort is our goal, Discipleship. Now, let us consider some tough love questions about preparation and our work in making disciples.

B. What is Discipleship?³

What is discipleship and what is Jesus calling us to in Matthew 28:18-20? Is this a command, or a suggestion; does it mean we are just to evangelize and let people find their faith on their own, or does this mean we are to lead others and teach the precepts of the Scriptures and the character of our Lord? Does it require obedience and action on our part, or are we disciples just by being a Christian and being in a church on Sundays?

This passage at the end of Matthew's Gospel is what is called the "Great Commission." This is also the great failure of the church! This is the main call to the church from our Lord and Savior, and is the one thing most churches do not do at all! This is the main reason for a church to exist. If discipleship is mostly absent from our churches, then most Christians will not understand how to live out their faith. They will not be able to handle problems, witness, share their faith, or grow effectively spiritually, because no one is modeling, or showing them the way! Some churches do a great job with evangelism, but once the people come in, they are stored in the pews. Where is discipleship? What is it? Is the back door of the church as big as the front door?

Being a disciple encompasses more than just asking Christ in, and goes far beyond baptism. Our conversion, our acceptance of Christ as Savior, our election, is the beginning, the entrance, into the faith and Christian life. It is not the only act of being a Christian! It would be like joining a club, but never venturing into the club. Baptism is initiation and public dedication. It is to be the door through which we go in our walk of faith, as is also our profession and testimony of our faith publicly. It does not stop there! It starts there!

³ © 1987, 2002, R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. *Discipleship Tools* <http://www.discipleshiptools.org/>

So, what does the average church do about discipleship? In most churches, people are encouraged to accept Christ or make a profession of faith. Then, they are congratulated, put on the membership role, and then quickly forgotten. Sadly, the Church has forsaken discipleship, and has left its members to figure out these spiritual growth things on their own. In doing so, it causes many to give up on Christianity, while others become confused, calloused, or complacent, or they are swept away by false doctrines and cults because they do not know the difference.

C. The Church Is Called To Make Disciples

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

This is perhaps the chief characteristic that most churches somehow forget. It is also the quintessential aspect and reason the church exists. So, why is it that so few churches actually have disciple making as a primary ministry? For most churches, it is something they think they are already doing when in fact they are not. Saying that going to church on Sunday is discipleship, or providing a couple of token adult Sunday school classes that few attend, is not discipleship. Some churches throw it in as an after thought, or may offer a class or something related to the subject.

Humbleness is characterized by the willingness to grow in Christ, and receive learning and experience growth. Peter tells us we ought to be humble toward one other so that we can know the grace of God and not be in opposition to God. Then secondly, he says, we had better be humble, not only toward one another, but toward God. This is so straightforward. This is so essential to be a blessed church, to be a growing church, not in numbers, but in discipleship!

Check out some passages that tell us discipleship and mentoring are not an option, but a command: ***Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 6:1-10; Mark 1:35 - 2:12***. We must follow out of our obedience and mentor in a multigenerational lifestyle, caring for the total person. This will move us from just playing church, to really *being* a church.

The effective church is mentoring, building relationships, and teaching each of the members by other, caring people, who are being disciplined themselves, who are being taught, encouraged, and led. Making disciples takes vision and the understanding of Scripture. It gives the church a purpose to form leaders who grow other leaders in an outgrowth of their growth. The Christian, especially the leader, who disciplines and equips others is a person who is living the faith for themselves and setting goals for their personal growth before they set goals for others. Their skills and abilities are growing them to be a better worker because first, they are striving to be a better child of God.

From the character of Christ will come the conduct of Christ, if we chose to follow Him. Then, those values of our daily walk, which drive our behaviors, will, in turn, influence others. You cannot lead where you have not been, or where you do not know the direction to go. This is why discipleship is so essential to the aspect of being a Christian. We are called, not to just visualize discipleship, but to do it; not to just talk about it, but to do it. One cannot just think

about dinner and satisfy hunger; the meal has to be prepared, then eaten! The effective church will take Scripture and the call of our Lord seriously, and then implement it into functioning! (*Job 23:11-12*) Jesus' purpose for His three years of earthly ministry was the discipleship and equipping of the 12 Disciples. This was His drive and where most of His time was spent. He was focused on the teaching of the kingdom of God, teaching men to see beyond their present situation to the life to come (*John 10:10*). With His teaching, Jesus entrusted His church and people to the care of the people He taught. They were to replicate themselves to others. The objective was that every Believer was an equipper, every member a minister, every Christian involved in the life and gifts of the Body to influence the world.

The Word must touch who we are, and transform the very core of our being. This is the knowledge that leads and transforms. One cannot lead where he does not know the way, and to know the way you must have knowledge. Knowledge comes from experience, and experience comes from discipleship. The will of God is for us to study His Word, which will change our behaviors. A Christian and especially a leader in the church must have the knowledge and experience to put into practice the work that needs to be done. The disciple will be studious so that the Word nourishes him (2 Tim. 2:15). He must study and apply the Scriptures, not just read it occasionally like a novel. The Word must touch who we are and transform the very core of our being (Heb. 4:11-12). This is the knowledge that leads and transforms.

So, what are we to do?

God does not ask us to seek converts, He simply asks us to do Discipleship. Discipleship is modeling and teaching Christians the precepts of the Bible-mainly prayer, doctrine, Christian living, and worship. Yes, we are still to evangelize, but that is not our main mission and call! When we evangelize, we must realize that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring people into an intimate relationship with God. This is an act of divine intervention and grace. He uses us as the tools, but He is the means! We are to care, and share with others His love and character. We obey and reach, but we cannot lead people anywhere. He is the One who leads!

This leads us to our role, which is to model to the convert Christ-like character, encouraging others to surrender themselves to Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20-21). However, this is only the beginning! Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. Surrender is the process in which we grow toward Him and His will and away from our Will (Luke 22:39-42). Surrender is making Christ Lord of all of our life. We have to get rid of our perceptions, reckless ideas, faulty thinking, and other such things that are barriers to our growth, so we can make room for Him.

D. There are three main areas or principles in discipleship:

- 1. Relationships and Mentoring**
- 2. Teaching**
- 3. Service**

Relationships

We are called to build a network of relationships so we can build one another up in the faith through friendship and mentoring! (fishers of men) Most people are intimidated by discipleship out of ignorance, fear, unawareness, or just not wanting to be bothered out of their "comfort zone." The term, discipleship, has been viewed as something only for the spiritually mature, or

just for certain people, such as Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders. What we need to see is Barnabas and Paul (*Acts 9:26-27; Acts 11:25; Acts 12:25*), and, later, Paul and Timothy (*1Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Cor. 1:1*), where the elder, more experienced Christian takes the inexperienced Christian under his wing, and helps him to become a better, deeper, more effective Christian for God's glory. Keep in mind that Paul was highly educated and an experienced leader, and although Barnabas may have not been educated formally as Paul was, or at Paul's level in the world, Barnabas was Paul's superior in the experience and knowledge of the Word. Friendship, knowledge, experience combined into mentoring, and the quality of the relationship are the keys for this spiritual growth to have happened. Discipleship equals friendship with a Christ-centered focus. However, it is very important that we make disciples in His image, not ours!

Teaching

The other main principle in discipleship is teaching. We are all called, as a church, to teach one another--not only the kids in Sunday school, but also all Christians at all ages and levels--how to live the Christian life. The new Christian, (and all Christians for that matter) need sound instructions on how to live the Christian life. We do not learn by magic or osmosis. Although the Spirit will lead, it is still our responsibility to learn and grow, and then to teach others! In most churches, there are some opportunities to be in Bible studies, and even teach. The focus must be to teach the basics first--how to study the Bible, how to pray, how to worship, essential doctrine, etc. And, as we grow, how to be a Christian family, how to find God's will, our conduct in the work place, discovering our spiritual gifts, leadership, and so forth. Then, the deeper expressions into the faith can be explored, along with accountability, and so forth.

Service

We are all called to put our faith into practice! We now take the relationships, mentoring, and learning, and carry it out in daily life. This is often expressed in service projects and missions, but that is only a small, although necessary aspect of service. Service is how we live our lives and model His character on a daily basis to those around us! When we are in ministry, we need to realize, it is not what I do, but whom I can equip. As we practice by reciprocating what we have learned to others, we will also be built up!

All three of these principles collate and build into each other synergistically. Discipleship can be skewed and people fall away if any of these three principles are let go. We will lose valuable opportunities to share and teach one another if, as Jesus stands at the door and knocks (*Rev. 3:20*), we are watching TV and ignoring His door. Remember, the focus is never the task in and of itself. Rather, it is the glory and worship of our Lord and the enabling of one another to do and be better at the Christian life. What we learn and do here during our short time on earth will echo throughout the vastness of eternity!

Just as anyone can be a friend, anyone in Christ can disciple. We cannot expect only a select few to take up this call and imperative, and we do not need to be spiritual giants to do the work. We just need to be real in Christ, be willing to learn and grow as one of His disciples, and replicate our knowledge to others. Many people may feel anxious when it comes to reaching out, and it requires a big step of faith that many do not want to make. Therefore, the excuses pile on top and over our responsibility. That is a flaw in our human nature, our sinful nature! If we all just sit in the pew and expect someone else to reach out to others, we are slapping our Lord in the face.

When no one reaches out, we are condemning others to feel and be lonely and isolated. We must

reach out as a team effort, linking people with introverted personalities and who are reticent at interacting with others, with people who are more extroverted and that do not have this problem. Some passages to consider on discipleship: *Proverbs 18:24; Matthew 7:18-24; 19:28-30; 10:1-42; Mark 1:1-5; Luke 9:23-25; 48; Luke 14:26-27; John. 8:31; 12:20-26; John 14; 15; 1 John:5:3; 1 Corinthians 3:5-11; 2 Timothy 2:7; 1 Peter 3:15.*

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In concluding our lesson on spiritual growth through discipleship, it is important that perspective be given relative to Beulah Baptist Church. Because we believe so much in being students of the word and following the path of discipleship that the Lord has put before us, here is our presentation and graphic of what discipleship ministry is offered here at Beulah. It is our prayer that we will all grow in this area not only as a pupil, but actively participating in the making of other disciples.

Beulah Missionary Baptist Church Disciples and Leadership Training Academy

The aim of the academy is to better equip our teachers and expand our ministries in the four disciplines as outlined in the Academy Organization Chart, and the areas are:

Discipleship / Evangelism Ministries

Church Leader / Teacher Training

Targeted Ministries (that are defined by a demographic such as age, gender, marital status, etc.)

Life Skills (Wholistic Ministry that will better equip our members with practical issues and better overall stewardship)

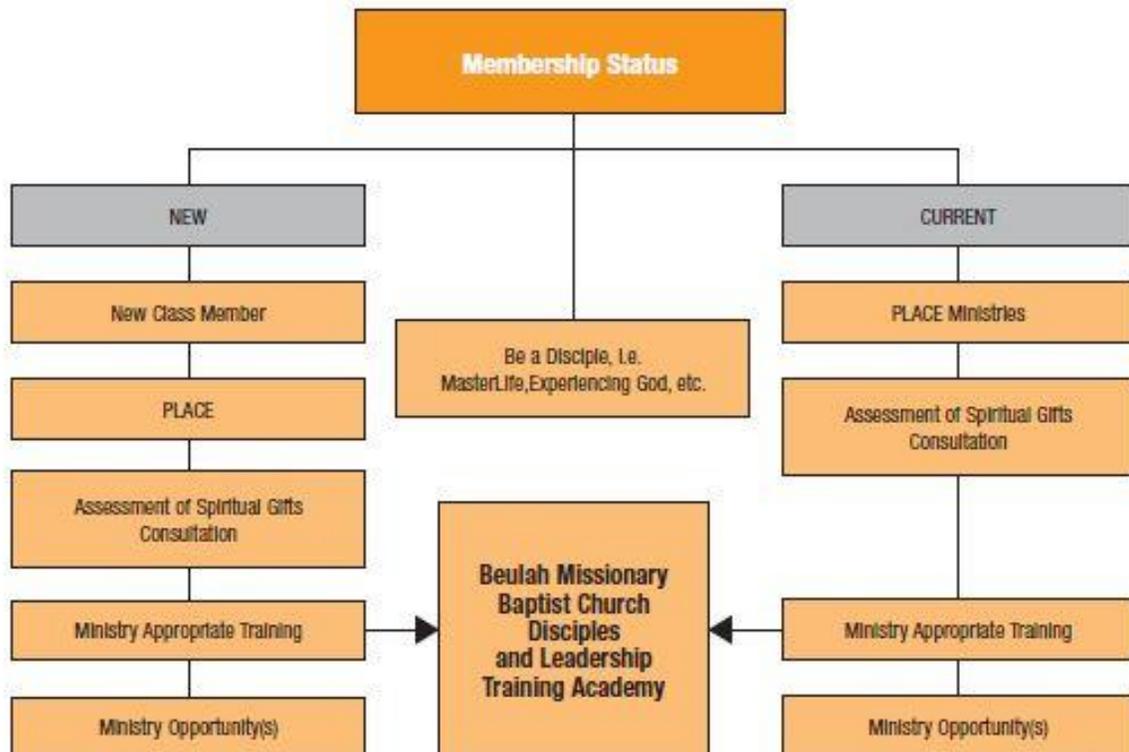
To further explain and discuss the details of implementation, there will be an announcement on planning sessions as well as how one and all can and should participate. I, Reverend Mark A. Seals, Minister of Christian Education, and members of our Board of Christian Education, your servants in Christ look forward to "Helping us all, get where God wants us to be."

Beulah Missionary Baptist Church – Reverend Jerry D. Black, Pastor

Reverend Mark A. Seals, Minister of Christian Education

Board of Christian Education

Format, Flow and Content of the Beulah Missionary Baptist Church Disciples and Leadership Training Academy



Beulah Missionary Baptist Church Disciples and Leadership Training Academy

Training and Development Process

The Bible says in Matthew 28:19 that we are to “Go ye therefore and teach all nations...” In fulfilling the great command of our Lord we are now preparing to establish the Beulah Missionary Baptist Church Disciples and Leadership Training Academy. This academy will be the training and development ministry of our church that will instruct and nurture all persons that will be part of our ministry of training and instruction here at Beulah. Furthermore, as we step into what our Pastor has shared of being a wholistic ministry; you will see in this illustration of our academy that all aspects of our ministry will be included. We will also grow all areas of biblical instruction to meet the growing needs of Beulah as we all have been a people to “...hunger and thirst for righteousness.” There will also be a more concerted effort with the implementation of our “Twelve Tribes” to focus on the inclusion and well being of all our new and existing members. To accomplish this, there will be a five (5) step process that all academy participants will go through, as you will see on the flow chart:

