

Practical Discipleship

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So, you want to disciple others. What does that mean? How do you do it? Unfortunately, the following is a common experience for many who have great intentions of leading others closer to the Lord.

You start a discipleship relationship with someone, and you ask him what areas of his walk with God he'd like to grow in. They share a few struggles with you and for the first few weeks, it's great. You're helping him overcome some struggles and develop in their walk, but then, after the first few appointments, it starts to get stale. You are struggling to find topics to talk about. You don't seem to be making much of an impact. Your disciple starts dozing off during your appointments. Eventually you either stop meeting or resort to going through a book of the Bible together, and it becomes more of a weekly Bible study than anything else.

Have you ever had this experience or one similar? If you have, or if you're just looking to start discipling others and want to know how to do it, this article is for you.

Deep, life-changing discipleship isn't a far-off dream; it can be a reality for you with a few tips, some practice, and a lot of prayer. Hopefully these pointers can start you off in the right direction.

Why We Disciple Others

Let's start by reviewing why discipleship is so important. First, of all the crowds of people that surrounded Jesus almost constantly, He chose to devote much of His time and teaching to 12 rather common, ordinary men. Why? Wouldn't it have been easier for Him to spend all His time preaching to the masses, winning many souls to Himself, and building up a huge number of followers? He could have easily reached tens of thousands and established a church with a broad base and large number of people. But what would have happened after His death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven?

The large number of new believers would be without trained leaders to carry on Jesus' teachings and no one would grow in their new faith - they would be like a boat without a rudder. Instead, Jesus chose to focus on 12 prayerfully chosen men who He staked His whole ministry on. He specifically and intentionally chose them, lived with them, taught them, and instilled His plans and purposes into them.

And now, starting with these men under the power of the Holy Spirit, the church has expanded literally around the world, with hundreds of millions of believers. The principle Jesus set is called spiritual multiplication, and the apostle Paul described it best in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

In spiritual multiplication, the aim is to invest in a few people, equipping each of them to invest in another few people, and so on. If you pour into 3 people, then they each pour into 3 more, you end up with 12 people developed and matured (your 3 + their 9). Then if those 9 disciples each



pour into 3 more, and so on, very quickly there can be a huge number of people disciplined. Jesus strategically ministered in this way, and we can too.

Why do we disciple others? Simple- because it is the practice Jesus set, and it is the most efficient way to reach the world. By pouring into a few, developing them in the character and actions of Jesus, and equipping them to develop others, we can be used by God to make a great impact in reaching the world for Christ.

How We Disciple Others

So, discipleship is developing someone in the character and actions of Jesus, and equipping them to develop others. It is simply passing on what you've learned and been trained in to others. To be a discipler, you first need to be a disciple. You need to be growing in order to help others grow.

The next question one might ask is: How exactly do I do this? How do I effectively pass on what I've learned to those I'll disciple?

There are five essential elements in discipleship: Evangelism, Fellowship, Teaching, Training, and Prayer. These are the nuts and bolts of your discipleship appointments, the mechanism through which you can pass on what you've learned. We'll take a look at each one individually.

Evangelism - It has been said that "discipleship without evangelism is just counseling." If we aren't taking our disciples out to share their faith, we become nothing more than a counselor trying to help sort out their issues and problems. Jesus called us to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19), and the first step in making disciples is sharing the Gospel with those who don't yet know Christ.

We need to be teaching our disciples how to share their faith with others so they can effectively reach others with the Gospel. The most practical way to teach someone how to share his faith is to actually go out and do it. This can be by taking him out to a dorm or the student union and doing spiritual questionnaires with people or just hanging out with a non-Christian friend and having a conversation about spiritual things. But it is essential that we take our disciples with us and share our faith together.

Fellowship - It is important to be a friend to the people we're discipling, so part of discipleship is developing that friendship. This can be inside or out of the set "discipleship time", but a deepening friendship is important in developing an environment of vulnerability and growth.

Teaching - This element deals specifically with teaching someone Scripture: what it says, what it means, how it applies to him or her, etc. It can be teaching a passage that addresses a struggle or issue your disciple has or simply a lesson on Biblical history or doctrine to help her gain a greater knowledge of the Word and how it applies to her life. Teaching someone Scripture helps develop heart, mind, vision, and character.



Training - This element deals with training someone how to minister to others. It could be training him how to lead a Bible study, how to disciple someone else, how to share the Gospel, etc. It is different from teaching in that teaching addresses your disciple's personal development, while training addresses how he can minister to others.

Prayer - Of course, prayer is a vital part of discipleship. A discipler should pray regularly for his or her disciples, as well as pray with them. This is the most vital of all the elements, because it is the Lord who will cause our disciples to grow, not us, and we need to be praying for them and praying that God will use us as a vessel to help them grow.

A discipleship appointment can be a combination of all 5 of these elements, or just a few at a time. Sometimes it is good spend the whole appointment sharing your faith with others, or teaching on a critical issue in your disciple's life, or even just hanging out and playing pool. Most appointments probably will have a mix of several elements.

But in order to have an effective, life-changing discipleship relationship, you need a healthy balance of all 5 elements coupled with a healthy dose of reliance on God. You need to be taking them out to share their faith, teaching them from the Word, training them how to minister to others, praying for them and with them, and just being a good friend.

One of the most important things to remember is that **discipleship is much more than just a weekly appointment** - it is demonstrating the Christian life to your disciple on a day-to-day basis. Most lessons you'll teach to your disciples will be outside your regular appointments - they will learn from you through seeing Christ in you as you walk by faith. Jesus simply lived His life in front of the 12 disciples and modeled to them how to live. Most people learn best by observing and experiencing than by being directly taught. So, make discipleship more than just a weekly meeting in the Student Union - make it an exciting experience and a deep relationship!

Getting Started

We've addressed why and how we disciple others, now lets briefly touch on how to get started and make it long term. One of the best ways to begin a discipleship relationship is by having a getting-to-know-you conversation. Ask what she struggles with, what she is passionate about, what she is afraid of, what she's experienced in her life, what she wants to see God do in her life through discipleship, etc. Make note of what your disciple says. Write things down if you have to. This will give you a good starting point on how to help her grow and develop.

One great thing to include in your first meeting is a "[growth circle](#)." This is an exercise that will help you and your disciple visualize what areas of development you can work on.

After you've done this, prayerfully formulate a long-term plan of action from what you've learned and observed from her. A semester is a good length of time to try to plan for. Use a chart like the one below. This chart lists 4 of the 5 elements, with prayer being understood to be a part of every appointment. Assuming an appointment length of one to two hours, you should have plenty of time to do more than one thing each week. Using a chart like this is a good way to look



ahead and see what you want your disciple to grow in through the semester and how you plan to help her grow.

Semester Discipleship Plan				
Date	Evangelism	Fellowship	Teaching	Training
9/3			assurance of salvation	how to share the Gospel
9/10	go sharing		eternal perspective	
9/17	go sharing			how to transition to Gospel in conversations
9/24		go out for pizza and bowling		
11/1	go sharing		authority of Scripture	
11/8			Quiet Times	how to share w/ friends
etc...				

[Go to Semester discipleship plan printable chart](#)

For more in-depth discussions on effective discipleship, the books The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman, and Personal Disciplemaking by Chris Adsit are excellent.

Hopefully these tips will help you see fruit as you disciple others, and give you a joyous, rewarding experience along the way! Happy discipling!



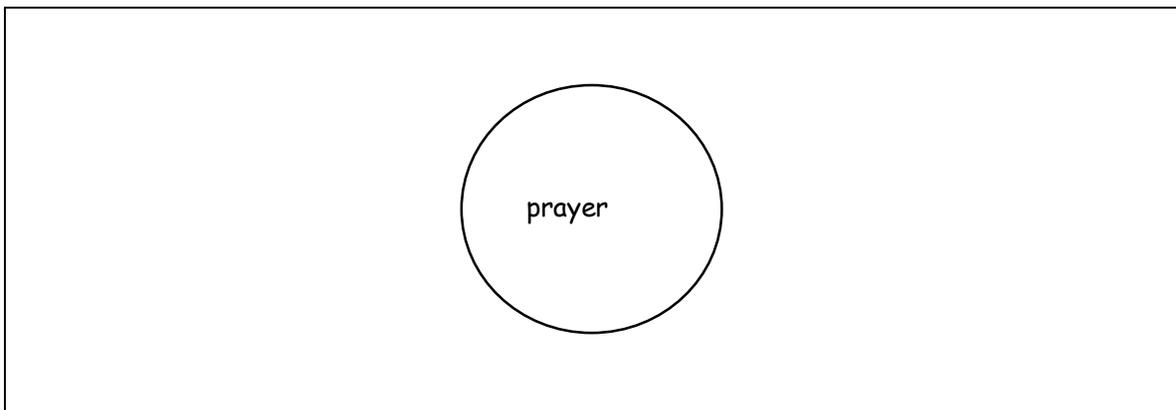
The Growth Circle

In discipleship, it is important to have a plan on where you want to take your disciple and what you want to help him grow and develop in. Some of these areas are vital truths that all Christians should be grounded in - like assurance of salvation, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, eternal perspective, and living by faith. Others will be specific struggles that people have - like lust, pride, how someone relates to others, or time management. As a discipler, we need to identify what specific developmental needs our disciples have and prayerfully formulate a plan to meet those needs, trusting that God will use us to help them grow. The growth circle is one way to help do just that.

Here is how to use this exercise:

Sit down with your disciple and take out a blank sheet of paper. Draw a small circle in the center of the sheet, large enough to write a few words or phrases in it, but not taking up too much space on the paper. Tell him that this exercise will help both of you identify some topics you can cover in discipleship.

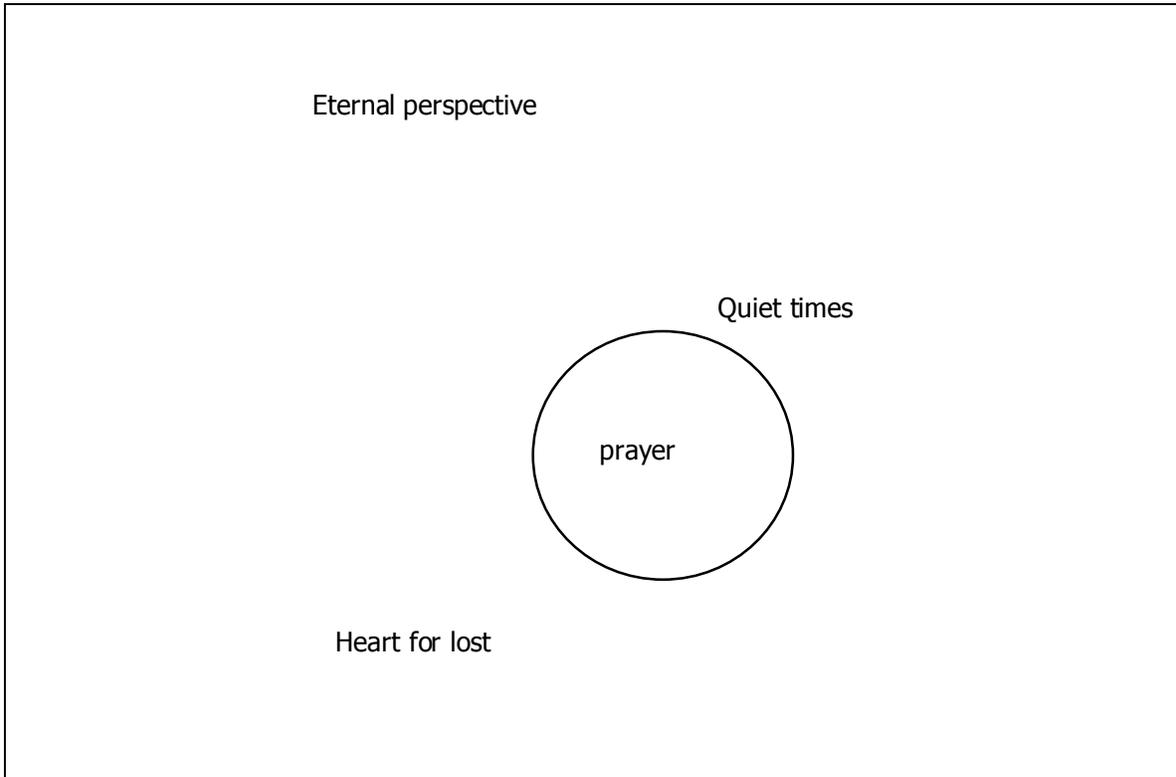
The circle represents the line between something your disciple is strong in and something he struggles with or is weak in. Before the appointment, make a prepared list, either written or mental, of discipleship topics. For a good starter list, click here: <<[link to list of discipleship topics \(http://www.godsquad.com/squadroom/discipleship/helptogrow.htm\)](http://www.godsquad.com/squadroom/discipleship/helptogrow.htm)>>. Go through the list and ask questions like, “How is your prayer life?” “How much experience do you have in sharing your faith with others?” or “Are you satisfied with the depth of your times in the Word?” If he is strong in a particular area, like prayer, for example, write that area inside the circle.



If he indicates that he is struggling or weak in an area, write that outside the circle. Write things that your disciple is weaker in farther outside the circle, and things he is not as weak in closer to the circle. For example, if you ask him if he lives with eternal perspective and he says he has no idea what that phrase means, write “eternal perspective” far outside the circle, close to

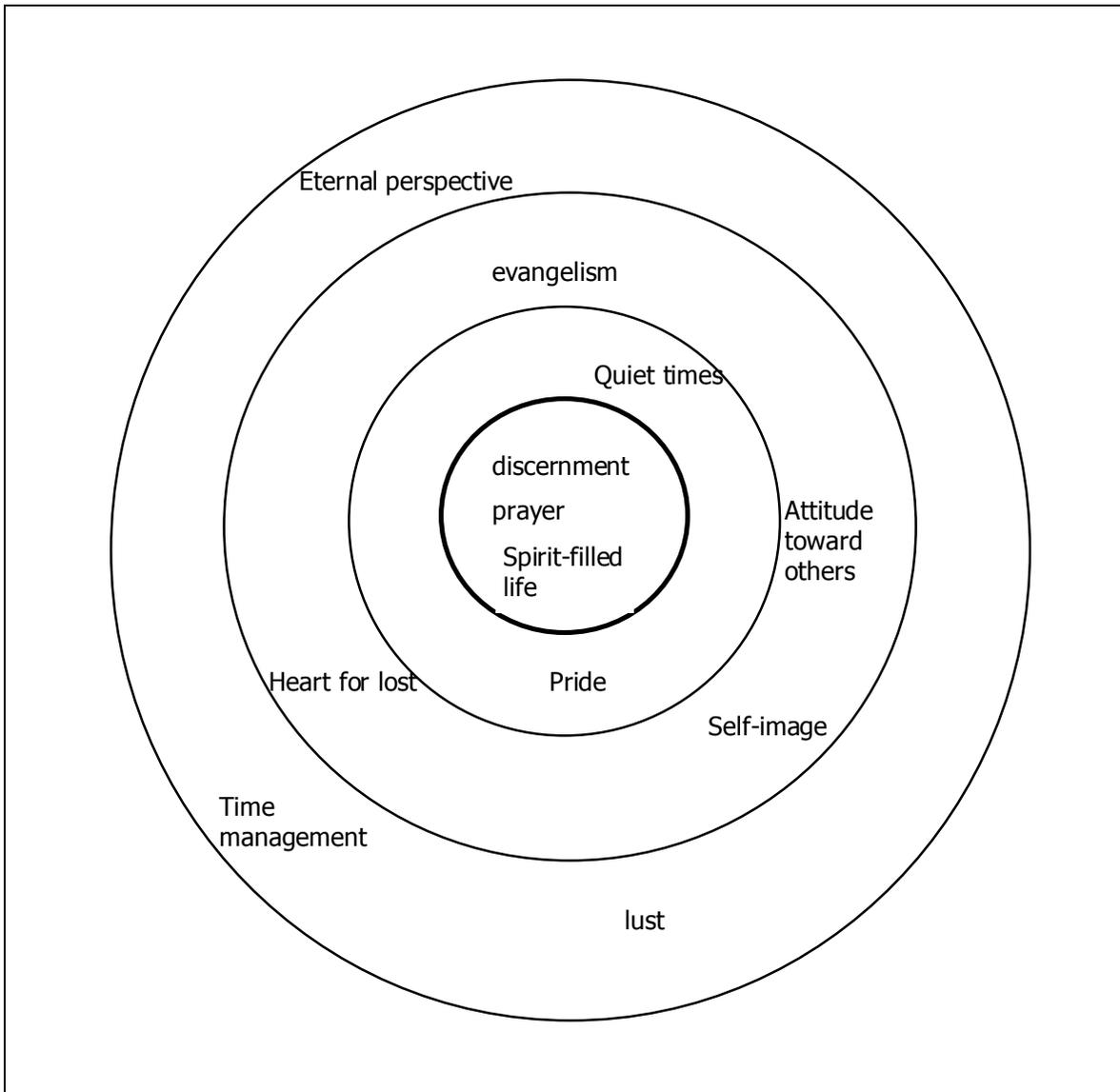


the edge of the page. Then, if you ask how consistent he is with his quiet times, and he says that he's fairly consistent but would like to be more consistent, write "quiet times" close to the circle. The next graphic illustrates this:



In this example, the person indicated that he has a good prayer life, is fairly consistent in quiet times, has a nominal heart for the lost, and doesn't know what it means to live with eternal perspective.

Continue to go through your list, writing items on the paper where they correspond to your disciple's development and strength in each particular area. When you are finished, draw larger circles around the circle in the middle of the page, grouping items together with others of similar strength in your disciple's life. The end result will look something like this:



The idea is that during discipleship you will work to help the center circle, the strengths in his life, expand to include the things he needs some development in. Your goal as a discipler should be to work with him on the areas outside of the center circle and pull them into the center, helping him become strong in those areas.

After you've done this exercise, hopefully you will have a good idea of some things you can work on in discipleship with the person you're discipling. Ask God to use you to help your disciple grow in those areas that he or she needs development in, and prayerfully look down the road and plan out what to teach and work on in the weeks and months ahead.



