

LESSON ESSENTIALS

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 1: Introduction to Discipleship

Following-up with a new believer is the key to helping him mature in his faith. However, the task needs a good measure of patience, prayer, kindness, discernment and more. This lesson will prepare you to become an effective discipler.

As a discipler, you will find that your life feels like it is often under a microscope. Even as you attempt to influence a new believer to be more like Christ, take this opportunity to first challenge yourself to greater heights in your Christian walk.

A new believer is like a 'babe' in Christ who needs the 'milk of the Word' for his spiritual nourishment. Read on to know how we can provide the source of that 'milk' for a new Christian from God's Word.

It is a good idea for you to follow-up with a new believer within 24-48 hours of their making a decision to follow Christ.

While we may busy ourselves in discipling individuals, we must remember that only God can produce growth. He might use different means to achieve this - His Word, His Spirit, relationships, circumstances, and more, as Philippians 1:6; 2:13 makes it evident.

Are you filled with excitement to share your faith with others? Many new Christians are eager to 'make disciples of all nations' and join God in His thrilling work. While you ought to be congratulated for those noble intentions, we must remind you that your job doesn't end with leading people to Christ. You also need to follow-up with new Christians - just like Jesus did with His 12 disciples - turning ordinary men into fishers of men.

Once you introduce an individual to Jesus Christ, and they accept salvation it is a good idea for you to follow-up with them within 24-48 hours of their making a decision. That is because this new believer or 'babe in Christ,' as scripture calls him, is in need of spiritual nourishment or 'milk of the Word' (1 Peter 2:2). As his knowledge of the Word strengthens, he will be able to move to 'solid food' as he matures in Christ (Hebrews 5: 12-14).

This discipleship will enable a person to grow in Godly character and become more Christ-like. You won't be alone in this effort. The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, will transform a person's character in areas of humility, submission, obedience, suffering, and exaltation, if he will just be open to allowing God's Spirit to work in him. Maturity will be evident in his devotion to Christ, being a witness for Christ, learning God's Word, being in constant communication with God in prayer, repenting and forsaking sin, faithfully involving himself in Church fellowship, and reaching out to those in need.

While we may busy ourselves in discipling individuals, we must remember that only God can produce growth. He might use different means to achieve this - His Word, His Spirit, relationships, circumstances, and more as Philippians 1:6; 2:13 makes it evident. Some people might not exhibit as much growth and maturity as others. Disobedience to God's Word, preoccupation with temporal things, unconfessed sins, and faulty mentors are some of the factors that can stall an individual's growth. However, you can rest assured that God is patient and, in His grace, allows people to respond differently to His Word. He deals with each one of us in a unique way, like a Father deals with His children (Mark 4:3-9; 14-20; Hebrews 12:7-11).

A disciple's lack of spiritual maturity should not discourage you from caring for him. For starters, you need to realise, while following-up with a new believer, that the first year is very important. After all, lasting faith is always built on a strong foundation. And even as you invest time, effort, and other

resources for the cause, be mindful of the fact that you are always under the microscope yourself. Your Christ-likeness will be a stronger testimony than what you say. Your most important responsibility is to live a Spirit-filled life as an example for a new believer to see and follow.

Discipling a new believer might sometimes be harder work than winning a soul for Christ. In some cases, it will be necessary to meet with a new believer two or three times a week for Bible studies, prayer, and counselling. Patience is a virtue that you might need in great measure while dealing with some of the newer Christians. Even Jesus exercised tremendous patience in discipling Peter. Even the Apostle Paul patiently persisted in nurturing the Thessalonian believers into Christian maturity like a nursing mother. Having said that, he also advised Timothy (also someone he discipled) in 2 Timothy 2:1-2 to judiciously invest his time with those who were committed and faithful. Hence, having discernment is very important in evaluating whether or not the person being discipled is faithful and will go on to disciple others.

It is also important to discern the kind of space that you might need to give a new Christian depending on their personality type. In your enthusiasm, don't suffocate the seeker by bombarding them with holier-than-thou preaching and heavy-duty doctrines. Give them 'breathing room' to grow, and let the Holy Spirit work in their lives in His own special way. Prioritise what needs to be corrected in a new Christian, making a conscious effort to not overdo the job. Ask the right questions and provide Biblical verses to let the Holy Spirit convict the young believer to respond to God's intervention.

As you get busy with follow-ups, remember that effective discipleship always includes these elements:

1. **Prayer:** ask God to work in your life as well as those whom you disciple (Philippians 1:3-6:1, Thessalonians 1:2, 3);
2. **The Word of God:** teach, coach, and train from the Word of God, not primarily from your own experience (Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2; Romans 10:17);
3. **Love:** Discipleship must be done with love. You should foster an environment of grace and trust, as well as honesty and loyalty (1 Thessalonians 2:5-8);
4. **Fellowship:** introduce the new believer to your church friends and Bible study groups so that they get

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5. connected to the Body of Christ (Hebrews 10:25; Ephesians 4:11-13.)
6. **Evangelism and Service:** As the individual grows, teach him how to tell others about Christ (1 Thessalonians 1: 4-10).
7. **Trusting God:** Only God can really make a spiritual change in another's life. We must trust God, and model our dependence on God for all things.

You will be surprised by the bond that you establish and the rapport that you come to share with those you mentor. By the end of it, you'll be richer by many friends!

IN REVIEW

- The Bible teaches us to follow-up with a new believer, so as to guide that person to grow in Christ.
- Your goal ought to be to lead a person to grow in Christ-likeness, even while you exhibit God's love and character through your life.
- Your role is to sow and water the seeds. It is God who produces growth.
- As you follow-up, try to be prompt, and exercise patience, kindness, and discernment, and to facilitate fellowship with fellow believers in the body of Christ.
- Some of the elements of effective discipleship are prayer, God's Word, and a loving relationship, fellowship, training and trust in God.

