

LESSON ESSENTIALS

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 5: VALUES LEARNED IN DISCIPLESHIP

Everyone can use a friend who is an encouragement, a good listener, and a strong Christian support. Let this lesson challenge you to be such a friend and mentor to at least one person. Trust, accountability, and love are some of the virtues evident in a discipleship relationship. This lesson will acquaint you with values that make this relationship stronger and richer.

Discipleship is a great way to help Christians get back on track and draw closer to God. This lesson will spell out the importance of discipleship in every Christian's life.

Discipleship is a relationship based on trust, where the mentor benefits just as much as the mentee. Discipleship causes a mentor to reevaluate his life so that he can be a good example to the person he is leading.

The most important fruit of one-on-one discipleship is the value of accountability. Trying to beat your body and make it your slave, as the Apostle Paul puts it, might not always be a piece of cake. Doing it all alone might make the battle even harder. This is where a discipleship relationship can help.

Contrary to common perception, discipleship isn't a one-way communication where the mentor speaks and the recipient benefits from his pearls of wisdom. It is a relationship based on trust, where the mentor benefits just as much as the mentee. Discipleship causes a mentor to re-evaluate his life, so that he can be a good example to the person he is leading.

Discipleship can be practised at an individual level, or in a group – both styles having their unique benefits. A one-on-one relationship offers guidance, a listening ear, and spiritual support during hard times. This relationship is based on trust and abounding in grace, where one person is completely accountable to the other. Sometimes, this relationship can also be an equal one, where both participants are equally accountable to each other.

While there are many benefits of such a relationship, you can't miss the level of trust and openness in such an equation. This comfort level enables the participants to share their struggle with sin, or areas of their life that they would hesitate to make public. Because of the nature of this relationship, the parties are not just blessed with emotional support, but also spiritual support. The two can counsel and pray for each other as they pour their hearts out.

In the case of discipleship groups, several people get together regularly for prayer and fellowship. These groups could be given different names by different churches. Some of the common tags are cell groups, prayer groups, or discipleship groups. During these meetings, each person is given time to voice his concerns, or to update the others with certain issues that he may be facing. It is understood that whatever discussed within the group stays within the group, and so people can share issues and prayer requests personal to them.

While some of these groups might choose to have age or gender restrictions, their main focus is to study the Word of God with the aim of sharing Biblical insights and participating in discussions and debates. Members, more often than not, enjoy being a part of these groups because a sense of camaraderie is shared between them and a sense of belonging.

Regardless of the format of discipleship that might be exercised, there are some core values that we can pick up from such relationships. The most important fruit of one-on-one discipleship is the value of accountability. Trying to beat your body and make it your slave, as the Apostle Paul puts it, might not always come

naturally. Doing it all alone might make the battle even harder. This is where a discipleship relationship can help. For example, if there is someone who is secretly struggling with a particular sin, such as pornography, or a smoking habit, having a good rapport with one's mentor might help in overcoming this sin. In such a case, accountability can go a long way in dealing with sin. A regular boost of encouragement and a periodic 'how's it going?' from the mentor can be more effective than any self-help book or a feel-good crash course. The mentor, too, will be forced to take stock of his life, given that a younger, more impressionable Christian is watching his every move. He might therefore become a better Christian himself as he exhibits the Christian virtues of integrity and spiritual discipline.

Discipleship groups have their strong points, too. In most churches, small groups are where Christians get an opportunity to help lead proceedings. Everybody gets a chance to preach the Word of God, teach the lesson, or lead the worship. Many a great preacher and worship leader got their first big opportunity to serve in these small gatherings. These groups not only teach Christians more about community living, and being fruitful in the church, but they also teach practical application of God's Word through in-depth Bible studies.

Simply put, if the group is studying about the fruit of the Spirit, they discuss together how they could actually bear such fruit in their personal lives, and then hold a mirror to each other as they struggle to grasp the practical application of the lesson. This group might grow in numbers, but more importantly, it grows in its relationship with God and each other.

Discipleship, be it individual or group, aims to bring people closer to God, and in the process enriches lives and increases our friend base. Are you ready to be a mentor?

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