

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

### LESSON 6: HOW TO BE A DISCIPLER

While Jesus has called us to make ‘disciples’ of all the nations, the task at hand can be difficult if we don’t rely on God’s leading. The mentor-disciple relationship is a fragile one that needs to be handled with care.

This lesson prepares you for all the mistakes that you need to watch out for in the act of discipleship. The outcome of a healthy discipleship relationship should always be to draw the subject closer to God and to strengthen Him in God’s Word. This lesson will help you keep your goal in mind as it tells you what to do or what not to do in the act of discipleship.

We humans can sometimes draw attention to ourselves instead of to God, even while discipling others. From citing personal stories and shifting the focus from God’s Word in a Bible study to handing out ready advice without leaning on God’s wisdom, there are many mistakes that we can make.

A good discipleship relationship by default involves a whole lot of sharing and accountability. Hence a cross-gender relationship might not be conducive to such a bond. While many young people might view this as narrow-mindedness, there is always a danger of forming an emotional attachment that might affect the disciple-mentor equation.

The epistles point out over and over again to rebuke those who persist in sin. 1 Timothy 5:20 says, 'As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.'

A friendship between two Christians is one of the most wonderful gifts God gives us. Sometimes this relationship is called a discipleship relationship when there is purposeful meeting together to learn and to grow as a follower of Jesus. Sometimes this relationship is called an accountability relationship when there is intention to confess sin and to hold one another to the standard God sets for us. These relationships can be wonderful growth experiences, but because of the nature of the bond that is developed they are potential pitfalls and so must be approached carefully.

A cross-gender relationship might not be conducive to an accountability relationship, because of the deep levels of confession and the closeness of this friendship. While many young people might view this as narrow-mindedness, there is always a danger of forming an inappropriate emotional attachment that might negatively affect the disciple-mentor equation. Such a bond is a dreaded catalyst that may lead to temptation and sometimes unwanted complications between the two people. A possible solution to that scenario could be for a husband-wife duo to minister to a person, if the latter is also comfortable with the arrangement. Sometimes, in a group setting, people of the opposite gender might be thrown together for the purpose of sharing and discipleship. In such a case, let your cultural setting and comfort level with the people in the group determine your involvement. There is always the option of breaking the group up into men and women if you feel the need to.

Whatever you do, do not exhibit an overbearing sense of control as a mentor. Unless the disciple in question is a child, or a teenager unable to make his own decisions, the mentor has no right to make his disciple's decisions for him. Simply put, even though the disciple is accountable to his mentor, he still has the freedom to make his own life-choices according to God's leading. After all, you wouldn't want the disciple to be dependent on you for every decision, would you? Instead, work towards instilling decision-making skills in your friend through Bible study and prayer, and do not spoon-feed the disciple with excessive interpretations and interventions.

Teach your disciple to lean on God, rather than on you. But that doesn't mean that you ignore the disciple's mistakes without correcting him. The epistles point out over and over again to rebuke those who persist in sin. 1 Timothy 5:20 says, 'As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the

rest may stand in fear.’ Sometimes mentors, for fear of coming across as too controlling or to avoid dependence, turn a blind-eye to their disciples’ obvious mistakes, hoping that they would realise their folly for themselves. This approach does more harm than good. It is a mentor’s responsibility to make his mentee aware of a certain sin and to show him the Biblical way. For example, if a disciple wants to marry an unbeliever, then it is the mentor’s prerogative to help his subject see God’s stand on the matter through His Word. It’s a good idea to leave the disciple to mull over a decision that has clear Biblical answers by just nudging him in the right direction.

Another common mistake that a mentor needs to watch out against is in the area of group meetings and Bible studies. Often, a leader tends to stray from a Bible topic by speaking more about himself in order to sound relevant. If the motive is to gain personal recognition, then we know that it is not right in God’s eyes. A good mentor will teach what the Bible says about a topic or passage, and may share how he has practically applied those truths in his life, giving God all the glory for it. This also means that a person who is discipling others should live their lives carefully and be sure to do what they say others should do. The Lord Jesus Christ is an example to all of us who are engaged in discipling others. If the person whom we are discipling sees that our lifestyle is contradictory to what we teach, there is no way that they would want to trust us, and rightly so.

The Bible does give us many tips in the area of discipleship. The Epistle of James tells us that we should be good listeners - quick to hear and slow to speak. We must constantly guard our words, especially the advice that we freely dole out to our listeners. We often over-spiritualise things and give ready solutions to problems, without waiting on God for wisdom. Sometimes people thrust their church doctrines or denominational distinctions on the disciple without taking the time to understand a new believer’s experience, or without discerning what the Lord intends for them.

Good discipleship stems from heeding God’s voice and following His rulebook, which is the Bible. Of course, you also need patience, sensitivity, honesty, and trust in good measure. While you might not have any degrees and certificates in discipleship, you can be sure that God is able to equip you to become a great leader and mentor. You just need to let Him disciple you.

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## IN REVIEW

- When it comes to discipleship, it is best to avoid cross-gender relationships because there is always a danger of forming an emotional attachment that might affect the disciple-mentor equation.
- A mentor should not be a control freak, but should patiently encourage the disciple to think for himself and to make decisions that are Biblically sound.
- Good mentors should be able to preach from the Bible into the context of the present day, and to keep the Scripture relevant.
- It is important to practise what you preach – to live the Bible and to keep Jesus as your role model.
- A good mentor should also be a good listener who does not impulsively dole out free advice that is contrary to God's leading.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- How can you follow God's leading while discipling someone, so as to avoid making the above mistakes?
  
- How can you practise what you preach? What are some of the changes that you will need to make in your life to be able to be God's ambassador?
  
- How can you be sensitive to the needs of your subject and bring out the best in them through this relationship?
  
- What are some of the mistake in discipleship that you are prone to making? How can you guard against them?

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