

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 8: THE DISCIPLESHIP CYCLE

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Exploring Discipleship. This series of lessons studies the spiritual formation of a follower of Jesus Christ – the process referred to as discipleship. The discipleship process occurs after someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ, beginning with a desire to live out God's plan for their life. When we undertake the task of helping a new believer to grow in their faith, we are said to disciple them. This material will benefit anyone wanting to disciple others, especially those who are practising evangelism, following up with new believers and helping them grow in their faith. Discipleship is the duty of every believer, especially those in spiritual leadership!

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is new Christians, those who would like a refresher on the basics of Christianity, as well as those preparing to teach these Christian practices and beliefs. Also, those with an interest in Christian thought will find value in these lessons as they pertain to daily living and choices.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 8: THE DISCIPLESHIP CYCLE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to understand discipleship as a cycle, with the end goal of making new disciples.

LEADER'S NOTE

Through our Christian walk we will always need the help of others. Each of us has something to learn from others, and each of us has valuable experiences that should be shared. Discipleship (or growing in our Christlikeness) will never be fully realized on earth. In this lesson we will look at the discipleship cycle which is completed when the disciple can mentor others and pass knowledge on to them. This cycle can also be used for other forms of discipleship, such as an experienced pastor training a younger pastor (who will someday mentor other pastors).

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ Have you participated in farming or gardening of vegetables? What did you grow? What were some of the steps that were necessary for the plant to produce fruit?
- ❖ What goes into preparing soil for planting? What does a plant need to thrive? What happens if the plant does not receive these things?
- ❖ If you were discipled after you personally believed in Jesus, what were some of the most important lessons you learned or changes you needed to make in your life?
- ❖ What was necessary for you to learn and experience before you could lead others to Jesus Christ?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **Reproducing:** One of the main objectives in discipleship is to train each disciple to be a discipler and thereby reproduce himself. We refer to this as the Discipleship Cycle. The Apostle Paul told his disciple, Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The goal is not to keep the knowledge to ourselves, but to teach it to others.
 - **Anticipating the Harvest:** Just as a farmer prepares the soil, plants the seeds and cares for a young plant until it is mature enough to produce fruit, a discipler should keep the end goal in sight: a mature Christian who is able to plant seed in the lives of other people.
- ❖ **Sowing Seeds:** Jesus knew the importance of nurturing young faith and giving it all the necessary elements for growth. The disciple must be the "right soil" in order for their faith to grow and spread to others.
 - Matthew 13:1-9 is Jesus' parable of the sower. Jesus' own explanation of this parable is given in Matthew 13:18-23. The seed is the Word of God, and the different soils are those who receive the Word. If the good news of Jesus is the seed, it is clear from this passage that not everyone who receives the seed will grow in their faith and be capable of producing a harvest (or spreading their faith to produce new believers).

ASK PARTICIPANTS:

- ❖ How is a seed being planted like the proclamation of the Gospel? What is described in this passage?

TEACH:

- In the discipleship cycle, you will be teaching people at various stages. This gardening metaphor can help us think about your disciples' responses to your teaching. In the parable, the seed being sown is the Word of God. The four different soils represent four different categories of receptivity and growth. People you disciple may be in one of these categories or may progress through all of them. The goal is always to help them become 'good soil disciples'.
 - o **Hard Soil Disciples:** The Gospel message, 'the seed', which has the potential to grow to true faith, does not take root. This person may not be a Christian yet, or may be a very immature believer needing great care and nurture. This soil needs to be cultivated through prayer and patience.
 - o **Rocky Soil Disciples:** This soil is like a new Christian who might have responded to the Gospel joyfully, but superficially, and is weak on follow-through. They are vulnerable to giving up because of trouble or persecution. This soil needs a lot of work to get rid of the rocks!



- o **Contaminated Soil Disciples:** Sometimes soil can be full of thorns and weeds that choke out the good growing plants. A Christian, once growing in their faith, may begin to let the deceitfulness, cares and riches of the world choke out their faith as it competes for their devotion. This can be the most challenging person to disciple. Some may even fall away from their faith.
 - o **Good Soil Disciples:** Good soil nurtures good plants that grow to produce a good harvest. The harvest for a Christian is not only the fruit of the Spirit, but also reproducing themselves by bringing others to faith in Jesus Christ and discipling them. This is the goal of discipleship. From here, the cycle begins again as God's Word is proclaimed to others. As the 'seed' falls to the ground and takes root, new disciples produce new disciples.
- The Bible uses this metaphor in other places to demonstrate the work that goes into helping a new believer.
- o Planting and Watering: 1 Corinthians 3:5-9
 - o Planting and Harvesting: John 4:35-38
 - o Harvesting: Matthew 9:37-38

❖ **The Discipleship Cycle:** Just as plants have a life cycle, so do believers in Jesus. Here we will look at the different stages of the discipleship cycle. Some of these stages will overlap somewhat, but you can use this chart to effectively guide your new disciple. This chart lists what a disciple will learn or practise and the resources you can use to help them.

Stage	Activity	Leads to...
1. Pre Evangelism	Preparing the Soil	When the soil is prepared, it can more readily accept the seed.
2. Evangelism	Planting Seeds	When the seed is planted in soil, it can begin to take root.
3. Christian Foundations	Taking Root	When the seed germinates, it can begin to push through the soil and take root.
4. Growth and Service	Growing to Maturity	When the plant grows, it can produce leaves and blossoms.
5. Spiritual Leadership	Producing Fruit	When fruit is produced, it contains seed that can begin the cycle all over again. The goal is multiplication.

You may wish to make copies of the discipleship cycle on the following pages for each of your participants.



THE STAGES OF THE DISCIPLESHIP CYCLE

<p>1. PRE EVANGELISM: A person must be ready to hear the Gospel in order for it to be well received. We must meet people where they are, and begin with what they already understand. Sometimes a relationship is necessary to demonstrate the Gospel. Sometimes we must meet a person’s physical needs before they are ready to think about their spiritual needs.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them have a positive attitude towards Christianity by showing love in action. • Help them have a positive attitude toward the Bible by showing its relevance to their life. • Help them see the need for a Saviour by sharing your testimony, and letting them see your changed life. • Help them learn about the person and work of Jesus Christ so they are ready to put their faith in Him. • This may include casual conversation, acts of service or meeting of physical needs, formal debates, spiritual surveys, literature distribution, concerts, special classes etc. 	<p>Discipleship Essentials Modules that will help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Evangelism • Who is Jesus?
<p>2. EVANGELISM: When a person understands who Jesus is and why He came, we can present the Gospel to them and show them their need for a Saviour. The act of evangelism can take many forms, and many different tools can be used. Some people will need to hear the Gospel multiple times before they are ready to receive it and respond to it.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them understand who Jesus is and why He came. • Help them to see their sin and their need for a Saviour. Tell them how your life has been changed. • Present the Good News of salvation available in Jesus Christ and offer them the opportunity to respond with a prayer of faith. • Follow up with their decision by explaining the new life they have in Christ, and the power available to them from the Holy Spirit. • Evangelism can take place one-on-one or through large group evangelism, events, or Bible studies. 	<p>Discipleship Essentials Modules that will help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Evangelism • Evangelism Using the 4 Spiritual Laws • Understanding Salvation
<p>3. CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS: New Christians will need an understanding of what the Bible teaches. They must understand their salvation and the implications of it, as well as how living as a Christian differs from their old way of life.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them understand what the Christian life is all about. They may spend time with you or others in fellowship and study of the Bible. • The practices of baptism and communion as well as church membership (where appropriate) can be explained at this stage. • They should begin habits of daily prayer, Bible reading and group Bible study, as well as worship with other believers if possible. • Help them to deal with matters of sin by exposing them to the Word of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to convict them. • Teach them to rely on God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. • Answer questions they have on the Christian faith, or seek out answers together. • A disciple should be taught the foundation of Biblical truth in some systematic way. 	<p>Discipleship Essentials Modules that will help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Salvation • Christian Life and Worldview • Our Relationship with God



<p>4. GROWTH AND SERVICE:</p> <p>The life of a Christian is centered on Jesus Christ. A believer who is growing in their faith will make choices that put God’s desires before their own. This stage can be difficult and take a long time. It is impossible for this to occur without the help of the Holy Spirit, so the new Christian must learn to lean on God and be faithful in prayer. At this stage, they should begin to serve others and undertake specific efforts towards evangelism. This is Christian ministry. Training in evangelism may occur at the earlier stages, but they may now be ready to grasp new opportunities, plan a personal ministry and undertake planned evangelism.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gently show them areas of their life where they need to put Jesus first (such as finances, time, attitude). • Help them see the need for healthy relationships, sexual purity, and personal integrity. • Introduce them to other Christians who are walking with God so they see many examples of Christ-centered living. • The goal is consistent Christian living, and a reliance on God rather than self. • Help the disciple discover their spiritual gifts. Model serving God and others, and set up opportunities to serve together. • Take opportunities to share the Gospel with others together. • Encourage the disciple towards goals of serving others, sharing the Gospel and getting involved in a ministry. • Help them understand the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, and prepare them for spiritual opposition by studying spiritual warfare together. 	<p>Discipleship Essentials Modules that will help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Disciplines • Christian Character Development • Family Life • Introduction to Evangelism • Spiritual Gifts • God and the Spiritual Realm
<p>5. SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP:</p> <p>At this stage, the disciple is reproducing new believers. They are leading others to Jesus, training or teaching others but still require discipleship in order to lead effectively. Most Christians will not end up pastoring a church or leading a spiritual movement – but every Christian can lead in small but significant ways. Leadership of family, prayer groups, or Bible studies are great starting places. The goal is multiplication – not simply addition of new believers.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a disciple grows in their ability to minister and serve, they will grow in their capacity for leadership. • Encourage your disciple to teach and disciple others, possibly by taking leadership of a group. • Effective leadership requires Godly character and a desire to serve rather than wield power. Help the disciple develop skills they need to lead more effectively (such as communication, decision making). • Help them see weaknesses in their leadership and rely on God to strengthen them. Pray with them. • Help them give good leadership and training to others so that more fruit is produced. • Keep them accountable to a high standard of Christian living. 	<p>Discipleship Essentials Modules that will help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring Discipleship • Leading Small Groups • Leadership Lifestyle • Christian Doctrine • The Church and Worship • Pastoral Basics



- ❖ **A Never Ending Cycle:** Since Jesus trained His Apostles, disciples have been teaching new disciples! This process of following someone's example is what strengthens us all in our faith.
 - **Starting Again:** When you share the Gospel with someone and they accept Jesus as their Saviour, the cycle starts again. It is not necessary for you to have completed all five stages – in fact evangelism (sharing the Gospel with others) should begin in stage three or four!
 - **Leading the Way:** The person who is discipling should be at a more advanced stage spiritually than the person he or she discipled. To be one or two stages ahead is ideal, though not necessary in the later stages.
 - **A Life-Long Process:** While one person may move through the first few stages in a year or less, it may take someone else several years before they accept the Gospel. Each of us moves at a different rate. Some people will never attain level five. This is not a formal scale, merely a guide to illustrate how discipleship works. The process of discipleship does not end; we will always need to become more like Jesus Christ while learning to serve Him. Knowing that producing new disciples is a life-long process will help us to not be discouraged!
 - Read [Philippians 3](#) in which the Apostle Paul describes life-long discipleship.

Following this lesson is a discipleship cycle worksheet. Your participants can fill it out as they reflect on the discipleship process. They will need a copy of the worksheet.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ What stage of the discipleship cycle are you at?
- ❖ What can you do to advance in your discipleship? According to the framework we have looked at today, what do you need to learn next? What do you need to practise? Who can you find to help you?
- ❖ What other resources are available to you in your discipleship of others, as well as your personal development as a Christian?
- ❖ What are some of the things that contribute to Christian growth? What has helped you to grow?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray for your participants and those they disciple. Pray that all of them will seek God's will in their lives, that they will keep their eyes fixed on Jesus (the author and perfecter of their faith), and that they would seek His glory (not selfish gain or praise of men) as they serve Him.



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLE WORKSHEET

1. SELF EVALUTAION				
What stage of the Discipleship Cycle am I at?				
1	2	3	4	5
What do I need to do to progress to the next stage?				
Who can help me or disciple me? Who do I want to learn from? What steps do I need to take?				

2. EVALUATION OF DISCIPLES
In the chart below, write the names of those you are currently discipling. Write down the stage of discipleship they are at and what you can do to help them grow in their faith as you regularly meet with them. Write down resources you will use, or ideas that you have.

Name of Disciple	Stage	How I can Help	Resources Available

3. PERSONAL GOAL



What personal goal do you have for the coming month? Concentrate on a goal you can achieve, rather than a goal for someone else's progress.