

# ***Getting Started: Wading into Discipling Relationships***

## **Welcome and Introduction**

Welcome to our first Discipleship Training Night! Out of our 12 distinctives, *Fruitful Discipleship* is our focus these next 9 months. Here's what we mean by *Fruitful Discipleship*: "We train growing disciples who make new disciples." You're here tonight because you want to go deeper into biblical discipling relationships.

If you're not already involved in this kind of relationship, you're about to set out on an exciting journey of obedience to Christ. Jesus has established these *committed spiritual training relationships* as a key way we grow, fellowship then introduce others to him.

## **Our Focus in These Trainings: The *Process* of Discipleship**

Our focus in these trainings is not on general Bible knowledge, Christian doctrine, or Christian living. We trust you're receiving this kind of healthy biblical teaching through our Sunday morning services, life groups, equipping classes, and other ministries. In case you missed it, we encourage you to listen to our message on Fruitful Discipleship for some basic definitions along with our broader vision for discipleship ([bridgepointbible.org/media](http://bridgepointbible.org/media) → *Distinctives*).

With these foundations in mind, our focus in these training times will be the *process* of discipleship. We want to provide practical, step-by-step wisdom for building discipling relationships with other believers. Over time, these relationships should result in *mobilizing* each other to share Christ with those who don't yet know him.

## **Five Discipleship Training Nights**

Here are the topics we plan to cover in our five training nights (subject to change if needed).

- 1. *Getting Started: Wading into Discipling Relationships*** (Sept 10)
- 2. *Going Deeper: Cultivating Healthy Openness Together*** (Oct 15)
- 3. *Discipling the Heart: Helping the Inner Person*** (Dec 3)
- 4. *Stepping Up: How to Affirm and Challenge in Discipling Relationships*** (Jan 7)
- 5. *Passing It On: A Lifestyle of Reproducing Disciple-Makers*** (Feb 4)

## **Discipleship and the Local Church**

The local church is headquarters for God’s mission on earth. It is God’s carefully crafted ecosystem for the believer’s spiritual growth. Discipling relationships are meant to take place within this robust ecosystem where we regularly gather, learn God’s word together, enjoy encouraging fellowship, worship through song and prayer, observe baptism and the Lord’s Supper, give generously, serve using our spiritual gifts, provide loving accountability, co-labor in personal evangelism, and fan the flames for world missions. Discipling relationships don’t *have* to be centered in your local church. But a healthy church is the ideal environment for it.

## **One Step at a Time**

The first step is often the hardest. For an early morning activity, the hardest part can be getting out of bed. But once we’re up and moving, the dominoes start to fall. Likewise, if you’re new to discipling relationships, the hardest step can be getting started—overcoming fear, lack of experience, or spiritual apathy. For some, it can seem overwhelming—figuring out whom to ask, getting up the courage to ask or sign up, carving out time by saying “no” to other things. But once you’re committed to moving, other steps often become clear, and the path opens up. When your car’s stopped, the steering wheel is harder to turn. But once you’re moving, it turns more freely. So let’s get moving.

## **What Are You Looking For?**

Here’s a good question to ask ourselves: *“What am I looking for? What am I wanting?”* Maybe you’re longing for deeper fellowship or spiritual encouragement. Maybe you’re needing guidance and direction. Maybe you keep struggling with secret sins and you want to live in the light with good accountability. Maybe you’re living in apathy and you want a spiritual push. Maybe you’re looking for a spiritual father figure, a maternal mentor, or a spiritual training partner. Maybe you have big life decisions looming and you’re wishing you had an older believer to ask for wisdom. Maybe you’ve realized you’re flying solo and you need someone to come alongside you and invest in you. Maybe you’re stuck and you want to get unstuck. Maybe you’re sick of unmet potential. Maybe you’ve experienced the joys of discipleship in a previous season of life and you recognize it’s now a missing link. Maybe you’re excited about our church’s emphasis on Fruitful Discipleship and you just want to jump in! These may all be good desires, as long as they’re rooted in the key principle: *discipling relationships are meant to produce Christ-like character that results in spiritual multiplication in others.*

### ***Personal Reflection and Discussion***

**What are you looking for? OR What have you enjoyed?**

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## New Lifestyles, New Culture

What we're seeking to build as a church is *individual lifestyles of discipleship* that produce a *church culture of discipleship*. Over time, we trust that the Spirit will foster a whole new culture of committed disciple-making relationships that replicate the life of Christ in both current and new believers.

## Finding the Right Person to Disciple You

Some of you are interested in *being* discipled. What are some practical steps you might take?

- 1. Ask God to guide and provide.** Wanting a discipling relationship is a good biblical desire. Paul prays that God “may fulfill every resolve for good” that fills the Thessalonians’ hearts (2 Thess 1:11). I’ve sought discipling relationships with men I thought would be ideal, and they were short-lived. And I’ve been placed in discipling relationships I struggled in, but sanctified me deeply over time. We can trust our good Father with the process.
- 2. Start with your current circles.** God expects Christians in all churches to build each other up. Paul says to the Roman churches, “*I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another*” (Rom 15:14). The deepest relational potential is with those you’ll already see on a regular basis. If you worship together, work together, meet together, serve together, work out together, or know each other’s families, you’ll have more opportunity to go deeper in the relationship. The more your life circles overlap, the more you can shape each other.

If you don’t know or trust anyone who could disciple you, consider whether you’re putting yourself in the right places to be around mature, loving saints. Do you need to come earlier to church, stick around longer, sit closer to people, or initiate more interactions? Do you need to start serving actively so you’re rubbing shoulders with others? Do you need to commit to a group or ministry with more seasoned saints? Are you only around believers in your own age and stage? Do you need counsel to overcome specific hurts or hang-ups that tempt you to keep your distance? Questions like these can help you discern how to expand and deepen your circles.

Here are some ways you might already view a person you want to disciple you:

- *I can tell they’re committed to Christ—spiritually active and growing.*
- *They serve consistently and joyfully.*
- *They seem to know God’s word.*
- *They’re wise and discerning.*
- *They care for others and treat them well.*
- *Their life is an example to me.*
- *Their life challenges me.*
- *I respect them and would want to be like them in some important ways.*

- *I know them and trust them.*
  - *They're open about their life with me.*
  - *They're willing to speak the truth and be honest with me.*
  - *I admire the effects of their life (e.g., marriage, work, service, gifting, parenting).*
  - *I'd like to learn from their gifts or experience.*
  - *They have a lot to teach me.*
  - *I know they really love me.*
  - *I'd like to ask them a lot of questions.*
3. **Be proactive but not hasty.** Committing to a discipling relationship is a significant step. We shouldn't rush in, then let our commitment fade. *"Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give"* (Prov 25:14). Rushing can result in lack of direction, definition, or consistency. But if you tend to be timid or procrastinate, be proactive (Prov 6:6–11). Learn to kill off the excuses that weave their way into your mind. Time flies, and it's easy to let the months, years, even decades pass without devoting ourselves to healthy discipling relationships. Be prayerful and patient, but proactive.
4. **Clarify what you're seeking.** When you ask someone to disciple you, it helps to communicate what you're hoping to gain. What do you respect about them? Is there something specific you'd like to learn from them? Are there topics you'd like to discuss? Spiritual gifts or ministry skills you'd like to develop? Aspects of Scripture, theology, Christian living, or practical ministry you hope to learn? Specific kinds of time you'd like to spend together (e.g., *"I'd love to learn about parenting... I was hoping you could teach me theology... I need some help knowing how to be a faithful Christian at work"*). You don't want to dictate the relationship from the outset, but you do want to share your heart—especially if the person lacks experience and will be seeking direction.
5. **Don't be discouraged by hearing "no."** Sometimes, people you ask will decline. They may be too busy, they may feel inadequate, they may be discipling others, or they may think it's not the best fit. But when someone declines, don't take it as *their* rejection but *God's* redirection. Sometimes it takes a process to find the right person at the right time.
6. **Ask for help if needed.** If you're struggling to find the right person, ask for help from one of your pastors, elders, ministry leaders, or someone experienced in discipleship. They can likely give you some suggestions about where to start. Personally, even if I can't disciple someone who asks, I do my best to help them find another person who can.

### ***Personal Reflection and Discussion***

List two people you'd like to disciple you OR describe the impact a discipler made in your life.

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## Inviting Someone into a Discipling Relationship

What are some principles to keep in mind as you consider inviting someone into a discipling relationship where you're the one primarily investing?

- 1. Ask God to guide and provide.** Jesus earnestly sought his Father in prayer as he called his own 12 disciples (Luke 6:12–16). We too should be prayerful (Prov 3:5–6). Disciple-making is the business of heaven, and God is ultimately in charge of forming discipling relationships in his time. Timothy would certainly need spiritual discernment to identify the “faithful men” he would train as future leaders (2 Tim 2:2). One way we access God’s wisdom is through other believers: “A wise man listens to advice” (Prov 12:15). In addition to praying, it can help to run your discipling ideas by a wise Christian friend, ministry leader, or elder. They may even think of people you weren’t considering.
- 2. Start with an accurate self-assessment.** Don’t think too highly of yourself (Rom 12:3). Some believers may be tempted to overestimate their own spiritual maturity and readiness to train others. Asking for counsel from spiritual leaders can help you gauge where you’re at.
- 3. Don’t mistake timidity for humility.** As a younger man, Timothy may have struggled with timidity. So Paul urges him to “*fan into flame the gift of God,*” passionately putting to use the spiritual gifts and maturity God had given him (1 Tim 1:6). Every believer is called to steward our spiritual resources well by actively using them. When an experienced believer shrinks back from discipling newer believers, this timidity isn’t humility. It’s actually a subtle form of pride, because we’re rejecting God’s clear calling for his church.
- 4. Beware of lopsided motives or programs.** You should want to build fellow believers up toward full maturity in Christ, *not* sell them on one aspect of Christian experience or one element of Christian doctrine. Paul reminded Timothy: “*The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion*” (1 Timothy 1:5–6). When we try to indoctrinate fellow believers into our own mini-movements, we sow seeds of future disunity. We also lead others into a lopsided faith by centering something other than Christ and his gospel. We want to train full disciples of Christ, not fractious groups with their own pet doctrines and closed systems.
- 5. Get to know the person first.** When you invite someone into a discipling relationship, it’s a significant moment. So it’s helpful if you’ve already spent some time with the person and have some meaningful connection. It’s clear that Jesus interacted with his own eventual disciples prior to inviting them into a committed relationship. This may happen organically for some people. But if it hasn’t yet, consider how you can informally get to know the person first. You might talk with them at church, or after an event you regularly attend. Exchange contact information, invite them to get together, spend time together as families, or sit together at a church event. Pursue them relationally first, and see how the Lord leads.

- 6. Clarify your invitation.** Jesus told his disciples he would make them “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). Older women are to train younger women in matters of faith, love, and family life (Titus 2:3–5). Paul invited Timothy to apprentice and partner with him in his traveling missionary efforts (Acts 16:3). Josh Howell likes to say, “Clarity is your friend.” You might draft out some bullet-points describing your vision of the discipling relationship.
- 7. Don’t be afraid of “rejection.”** Sometimes, the person you ask will decline. There may be any number of reasons why it’s not the right fit. Don’t be surprised, discouraged, or upset. Most of all, don’t take it personally—it’s not their rejection but God’s redirection.
- 8. Develop a plan and expectations together.** When you’re discipling someone new, talk with them about the plan—what you typically do, what they’d like to learn, what they hope the relationship and time together might look like. You might have a concrete plan, or a favorite process, or something you’ve done before with other people. Yet it’s still best to allow the other person to help shape the plans. You’ll get to hear their heart, their hopes and expectations, and some ideas you may not have considered.
- 9. Know that you’ll learn as you go.** Every discipling relationship is its own dynamic classroom. No matter how much discipling experience you have, you’ll always learn from the process. This is part of Jesus’ master plan—we learn as much from being the trainer as the trainee. For example, in teaching my teenagers how to park a car, I’ve learned important methods and teaching tools I’d never considered before, even though I’ve driven for 26 years. Also, if you’re newer to discipleship, recognize that there will be areas of your own life that need growth. These areas were not as exposed before, because you weren’t taking proactive steps to invest in others who will now experience both your strengths and weaknesses up close. At times you’ll want to seek out other believers with discipling experience to glean wisdom from them along the way.
- 10. Set an initial timeline and be faithful to your commitment.** Committing to disciple someone is a serious commitment. Ideally, this person will open up their life to you, look to you for biblical guidance and counsel, receive personal affirmation and correction, and have their heart shaped by you. At the same time, no one knows exactly how the discipling relationship will go or what life will throw at us along the way. It’s wise to set an initial timeline and plan, with plans to evaluate together at a certain point. Then, once you get started, be faithful to your commitment, and communicate clearly if things change.

## Inner Struggles with Offering to Disciple Someone

Are there any inner struggles you sense in your spirit when you think about inviting someone into a discipling relationship?<sup>1</sup>

Inner Struggles with Initiating Discipleship

### *Personal Reflection and Discussion*

What do you think is your next step?

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<sup>1</sup> Some possibilities include: (1) It seems prideful for me to offer to disciple someone. (2) It feels like I'll be putting them in an awkward situation. (3) What if they don't want to be disciplined by me? (4) I'm not mature enough to disciple someone else. (5) I'm spiritually mature but I don't know how to disciple others. (6) I wouldn't know what they're going through. (7) Something in my past disqualifies me from playing this kind of role.

## Three Discipleship Pathways

### 1. Pre-Discipleship: 1-to-1 Bible Reading

If you have little to no experience with a *committed spiritual training relationship*, consider making this simple commitment: Invite a fellow believer to read Scripture with you, discuss what you're reading, talk openly about your lives, and pray together.

**Some Biblical Books:** Mark, Romans, Philippians, Micah

**Practical Resource:** David Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian* (Youngstown, OH: Matthias Media, 2010), 103 pages.

**Summary:** Read, Share, Pray

### 2. Personal Discipleship: An Informal Discipling Relationship with Two or More Individuals

Personal discipleship is where an individual or small group spend regular time together for the purpose of spiritual investment, growth, activity, and eventual replication through active ministry. Although everyone encourages each other, there is a clear distinction between the one leading and those participating.

### 3. Program Discipleship: A Structured Curriculum and Timeline

Some discipling relationships are more formally programmed with concrete steps, activities, exercises, materials, or curriculum, and a preset timeline. For example, this year our Men's Ministry has disciple-making groups that can be joined pending the availability of qualified leaders. The benefit is that the structure, curriculum, and commitment are clear up front. You can know basically what you will discuss, learn, and do. You may also be able to replicate the process with others when you're finished. With any program, you want to make sure the content is biblical, the relationships are meaningful, you're addressing real heart and life issues, and you're developing biblical skills you can replicate with others.



# Starting Points for Conversation

