

SESSION 14

PRACTICAL DISCIPLESHIP

THE CHURCH'S MISSION is to make disciples. But what does discipleship look like? Too often we think of discipleship as a set of classes taught by leaders in the church. Instead, we should realize that the making of disciples is the work of every believer. Discipleship is an informal process in which we instruct others (through our words and actions) in the truth of God's Word. By calling people to imitate us, as we imitate Christ, we help people become devoted disciples of our Savior.

STEPS TO PREPARE

1. Read the main passages for this study, recording your insights and questions:
 - ▷ Deuteronomy 6:4-7
 - ▷ Acts 20:17-24
 - ▷ 1 Corinthians 4:14-21; 11:1
2. Review the Teaching Plan (pp.149-152).
 - ▷ Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
 - ▷ Adjust the plan if necessary.
3. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp.153-158).
 - ▷ Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
 - ▷ Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.

LESSON OUTLINE

DISCIPLESHIP SHOULD BE...

1. *Informal (Deut. 6:4-7).*
2. *Instructional (Acts 20:17-24).*
3. *Imitation (1 Cor. 4:14-21; 11:1).*

SESSION 14

TEACHING PLAN

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP

CONNECT

OPTION 1

Begin by sharing the story of a young preacher needing correction on an important subject and a faithful couple with a decision (p.153).



When have you been in a situation where a teacher said something you believed to be in error? How did you handle the situation?

Note that we should want to correct aberrant teaching, but we should do so as giving truth with grace. Then explain that the introductory story tells of Apollos in the Book of Acts being disciplined by Priscilla and Aquila. Finally, summarize the lesson (p.153).

OPTION 2

For this option, break students into small groups with the instructions to come up with a list of:

- 1) people who influence them positively in a direct way.
- 2) people who influence them positively in an indirect way. (An example of the first might be a coach or a teacher because they interact with the student directly, while the other might be an artist or superhero since that influence is done in an indirect manner.)

After students have had time to conduct their lists, bring them back together to share some of their answers. Use the following questions to help before moving to the transition part of the session.



What are some examples of direct and indirect influence in your life? How do these influences affect you positively? Do you seek to imitate these influences? Why or why not?

TRANSITION

The church's mission is to make disciples. But what does discipleship look like? Too often we think of discipleship as a set of classes taught by leaders in the church. Instead, we should realize that the making of disciples is the work of every believer. Discipleship is an informal process in which we instruct others (through our words and actions) in the truth of God's Word. By calling people to imitate us, as we imitate Christ, we help people become devoted disciples of our Savior.

CONVEY

DISCIPLESHIP SHOULD BE...

THE RULES OF THE GAME

Discipleship involves rules and instructions. Instructions aren't given to ruin your day; they are given with your betterment and discipleship in mind. Instructions are given so you may become more like Christ. So the next time you are given instructions, remember that our discipleship is instructional and is for our good and God's glory.

► What does discipleship mean to you?

A BETTER WAY OF LEARNING

Deuteronomy 6:7 talks about parents who teach their kids about God in a casual way. These parents talk about God when they walk, sit in their house, get up in the morning, and before they go to bed. When we learn about Jesus we aren't simply learning facts (even though that happens). We are learning what it means to grow closer to Him and how the gospel impacts our lives on a personal level everyday.

► How does God use our personal relationships with other believers to lead us into a deeper knowledge of the truth of His Word?

1. INFORMAL.

Address the idea that we often consider discipleship to be rigid and formal and in a classroom, but the Bible also describes informal discipleship taking place everywhere. Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 6:4-7. Show how discipleship must affect every part of us, and in every place (p.154).



At this point, consider using the story “The Rules of the Game” in the Personal Study Guide (p.119) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar



What are some ways we can make sure our understanding of discipleship is not a “Sunday-only” type of experience?



How have you sought to cultivate a heart for God in the daily rhythms of home and school?

Point to the reality that parenting involves repeated, informal reminders. Like children, Christians constantly need the Word of God put before them, both in formal event and in the midst of life's normal events (pp.154-155).



Take the instructions of Deuteronomy 6 and apply them to contemporary life. What does talking about God's Word “when you sit” or “on the road” or “when you lay down” or “when you wake up” look like today?

2. INSTRUCTIONAL.

Note that discipleship is also instructional through our words and actions. Read Acts 20:17-24, and proceed to breakdown the how, where, and what of discipleship (pp.155-156):

- **How Paul Discipled: Proclaiming and Teaching.** Explain the differences between proclaiming and teaching in discipleship. Be clear that both are important and necessary.



At this point, consider using the story “A Better Way of Learning” in the Personal Study Guide (p.121) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar



Discuss a time when God spoke to you through a sermon or in a group study of God's Word. How does God use both preaching and teaching to reach our hearts?

- **Where Paul Discipled: In Public and from House to House.** We rely heavily on those who lead in public, but show that we must also view our homes as assets for kingdom work. Refer to the introductory story as an example of this in-house discipleship.



How does God use our personal relationships with other believers to lead us into a deeper knowledge of the truth of His Word?

What Paul Taught: Repentance and Faith



In what ways might we be tempted to view our walk of faith as a treaty rather than a surrender?

3. IMITATION.

Say also that discipleship takes place within the context of personal relationship. Then read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21; 11:1. Highlight the importance of imitation in discipleship, and ultimately, the imitation of Christ. Describe the difference between telling someone how to change a tire and actually showing someone. Then connect this to living out one's faith in service to God and His mission (pp.157-158).



At this point, consider using the story “You Become What You Behold” in the Personal Study Guide (p.122) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar



Does it feel strange for you to think about telling someone else to imitate your example? Why or why not?



How will others see Christ in your life this week?

YOU BECOME
WHAT YOU
BEHOLD

Discipleship is a process of imitation. We act like Christ because we know Him and want to be just like Him. As believers, we should also be the type of people that younger believers want to imitate as they grow in their walks with Christ. Paul encouraged believers in 1 Corinthians 11:1 to be imitators of him, as he is of Christ. Who can you learn from as they imitate Christ? How can you be an example of Christ to those around you?

► *What things should believers want to know about Christ?*

NOTES:

[illegible]

COLLIDE

After spending several sessions walking through who the church is and how the church lives, we end our study with a quick investigation of how discipleship might be conducted within the life of the church.

Much like the previous session, there are a number of insights to glean from doing practical discipleship. In fact, if you have done student ministry for an extended period of time, you might recognize the points in this session as being applicable to the student ministry context. Discipleship among students is often informal—taking place while hanging out—and complements the instructional part of student ministry (as the old saying goes, “they don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care”).

It is also important to stress the imitation side of discipleship, knowing that as student leaders, you are providing students with an example to follow in life and in faith. In essence, you are a hero to them, and having biblical heroes is important for the Christian life (Heb. 13:7). That may sound like a weighty responsibility—and it should—but it is not one done solely in your own strength and ability. While student discipleship is not a small task, your personal goals for them to imitate are simple—lovingly speak God’s truth into their life, and live out the truth that you speak.



Which points of this lesson stood out to you the most? Why?



What are some practical ways you grow in your own personal discipleship?



Why is it important to imitate our leaders and to have heroes in the faith? Read Hebrews 13:3. What does this say about having heroes in the faith?



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

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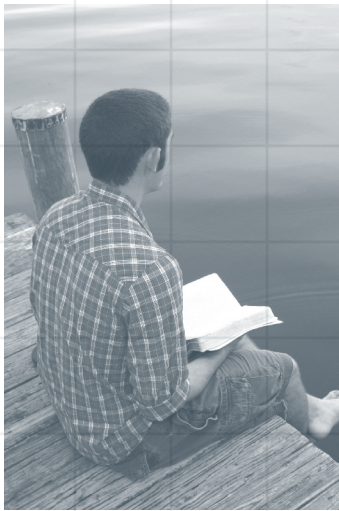
by Philip Nation

EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT

PRACTICAL DISCIPLESHIP

DISCIPLESHIP SHOULD BE INFORMAL,
INSTRUCTIONAL, AND IMITATION.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION AND DISCUSSION STARTER



A young man arrived in town and fearlessly let everyone know what he believed. With courage, he spoke eloquently about the gospel. It was evident that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The teaching he delivered was accurate regarding the work of Jesus. He went to the religious establishment in the city and boldly spoke about the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

But something unexpected happened. As this man was teaching, a husband and wife who were also believers heard him speak incorrectly about baptism. Though he was a powerful and anointed preacher, he was confused about an important subject. The

couple was faced with an important choice: stand up in the middle of his teaching to rebuke him publicly or choose a more private path.



When have you been in a situation where a teacher said something you believed to be in error? How did you handle the situation?

Hearing someone who is excited about the gospel but wrong about an important subject can be unsettling. As believers, we do not want aberrant teaching about Christianity to persist. At the same time, we must deliver truth with grace, even to those who are passionate about their teaching.

The response of the married couple is the one we should all hope to emulate. The preacher was a man named Apollos. The couple was Priscilla and Aquila. The scene was the first-century church. Rather than calling the preacher out, this couple invited him into their home where they “explained the way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26). It was an opportunity to disciple him with Christian care.

**VOICES FROM
THE CHURCH**

A growing church member is someone who looks more and more like Jesus in attitude of heart, thought, speech, and action. That's what we long to be and long for our churches to be.¹

—Thabiti Anyabwile

DISCIPLESHIP SHOULD BE...

1. INFORMAL (DEUT. 6:4-7).

In the West, we often lean toward a mode of discipleship that is rigid and formal. We think of discipleship in terms of hearing and learning truth, and we envision the classroom as the place where discipleship “happens.” The Bible doesn’t downplay the importance of formal settings for teaching and instruction (as we will see), but in passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-7, we discover that discipleship is something that should take place *everywhere*, in every arena of life. Take a look:

“Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut. 6:4-7)



What are some ways we can make sure our understanding of discipleship is not a “Sunday-only” type of experience?

Moses was responsible for passing along the truth of God to the people. In doing so, he focused first on having a passion for the Lord. His encouragement was to love God with all of one’s being.

If Moses had instructed the Hebrews to love the Lord with just their mind, then we would need to model all of our discipleship after an academic setting. But the initial instruction is to love the Lord with our heart, soul, and strength.

Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. This includes what we learn, of course, but it must affect everything about us. Such a process cannot be accomplished in a single setting; instead, growth should happen in all of the informal occurrences of simply living our lives.



How have you sought to cultivate a heart for God in the daily rhythms of home and school?

Think about this: how does one generation pass the faith on to the next generation? Sometimes we think of the Old Testament people of God as mechanically going through ritual upon ritual. But the direction from God through Moses was different. The people were instructed to take God’s eternal truth and apply it in the informal, normal places of life.

Parents were encouraged to teach the principles of the law in everyday circumstances. Walking with God and living out His Word is something that must be repetitively taught to people. Children need to be reminded to pick up their toys, eat all of their vegetables, and not to slam doors (even though a parent may have given these instructions often). For us to grow spiritually,

we are similar to children. We need informal reminders in everyday life that God's Word applies to every circumstance.

Moses told the people to teach their children when they were home, out on the road, or getting ready to lie down for a night of rest. We are to put the Word of God repeatedly before others in the midst of life's normal events. Growing in our faith should not be reserved for when extraordinary circumstances occur. The gospel, and growing in it, applies even to the boring parts of our lives. There is no circumstance where a person cannot be discipled to follow Jesus more passionately.



Take the instructions of Deuteronomy 6 and apply them to contemporary life. What does talking about God's Word "when you sit" or "on the road" or "when you lay down" or "when you wake up" look like today?

2. INSTRUCTIONAL (ACTS 20:17-24).

So, not only does discipleship take place in the informal settings of life; it is also instructional. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives.

Take a look at Paul's "farewell address" to the elders of the church in Ephesus. In this passage, we get a glimpse at *how* Paul had discipled these people, *where* this instruction took place, and *what* the content was that he delivered.

Now from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time— serving the Lord with all humility, with tears, and with the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews— and that I did not shrink back from proclaiming to you anything that was profitable or from teaching it to you in public and from house to house. I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus. "And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, bound in my spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, except that in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me. But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:17-24)

How Paul Discipled: Proclaiming and Teaching

In this passage, we see the apostle Paul describing his work of instruction from two different perspectives. First, he did the work of "proclaiming to you anything that was profitable." The word "proclaiming" has the same root word from which we get our English word "angel." It is the work of publicly announcing something. Paul, as we read about throughout his ministry, was

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Discipleship is a matter of learning to live out the realities that the gospel creates.²

—Michael Bird

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

You are somebody's disciple. You learned how to live from somebody else. There are no exceptions to this rule, for human beings are just the kind of creatures that have to learn and keep learning from others how to live.³

—Dallas Willard

accustomed to instructing people in large gatherings where he announced the truth of the gospel.

So, in one sense, discipleship happens when the truth comes at us in a one-way monologue. We see this in the discipling ministry of a church leader delivering a sermon or a friend boldly delivering truth to us. The proclamation side of discipleship gives us the opportunity to hear the truth preached to us with authority and certainty.

Yet Paul also employed the word “teaching” in describing his discipleship ministry among the Ephesians. In teaching, discipleship moves from monologue to dialogue, very much like the group that you participate in using this material. During the group meeting, your leader discusses the truth. Questions are asked and answers are given. (It is similar to what we see in Neh. 8:8.) For discipleship to have its full impact, individuals need the opportunity to interact with one another.



Discuss a time when God spoke to you through a sermon or in a group study of God's Word. How does God use both preaching and teaching to reach our hearts?

Where Paul Discipled: In Public and from House to House

In looking at the comments by Paul, we also get a sense of where discipleship took place. It is a reminder that not much has changed from the directions given through Moses. Paul's example was to provide instruction in two environments: “in public and from house to house.” Here we see the method of proclaiming and teaching through again.

In discipleship, we have the tendency to lean heavily on those who can do the public work of proclaiming the truth. Because we like hierarchies and clear lines of authority, we put a great deal of trust (and demand) upon the leaders, preachers, and teachers in the church body. But discipleship cannot be confined to just the public meetings of the church family where people with titles then help everyone grow in their faith. Again, think about the opening story from this session that is taken from Acts 18. Our homes are assets for kingdom work. They should be outposts for ministry rather than a fortress of solitude from the world.



How does God use our personal relationships with other believers to lead us into a deeper knowledge of the truth of His Word?

What Paul Taught: Repentance and Faith

If we are going to disciple, there must be content. Paul summarized his instructions with the simple phrase “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.” Here we see what Paul taught Jew and Gentile alike. This is the foundation of discipleship.

Paul leads out with repentance. The Lord calls us to repent or turn away from sin. We must acknowledge that, left on our own, we are spiritually

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

[Discipleship is] a school where we learn to be what God made us to be at the dawn of creation, His image bearers, living in harmony with Him and one another.⁴

—Daniel Montgomery and Mike Cosper

bankrupt. Discipleship is helping someone drop that façade, the idea they can achieve what is necessary without the help of God.

Paul's instruction, and consequently ours as well, also concerns the activity of our faith—our faith is in the person of Jesus the Christ. Faith is not merely an emotion but an act of the will. We decide to trust in Christ.

How do we teach people to have faith? We focus on the gracious character and holy justice of God. We lift high the character of God. We are asking someone to place complete faith in the One who is the author of life.

To put it another way, instructing about personal faith must distinguish between the ideas of a treaty and surrender. When two political nations enter into a treaty, each one retains its sovereignty, maintains its borders, and agrees to trade favors with one another. In a surrender, none of that happens. Instead, one nation surrenders its sovereignty, no longer has a boundary marker, and serves the ruling power. In leading people to be disciples with faith in Jesus, we are not calling them to a treaty with God. They are called to surrender.



In what ways might we be tempted to view our walk of faith as a treaty rather than a surrender?

3. IMITATION (1 COR. 4:14-21; 11:1).

There's another element of discipleship we would do well to remember. *Discipleship takes place within the context of personal relationship.* It is more than transferring biblical information from one person to another; it includes imitating others who are imitating Christ.

I'm not writing this to shame you, but to warn you as my dear children. For you can have 10,000 instructors in Christ, but you can't have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. This is why I have sent Timothy to you. He is my dearly loved and faithful son in the Lord. He will remind you about my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are inflated with pride, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the talk but the power of those who are inflated with pride. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ. (1 Cor. 4:14-21; 11:1)

Imitation is a key facet of discipleship. Paul made the bold request of the Corinthian believers that they imitate his life. It sounds ridiculously arrogant until we read his words in 1 Corinthians 11:1—"Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ." Ultimately, Paul was not asking others to live like him but to live like Jesus.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

Repentance is the door which shuts out sin, but faith is the post upon which its hinges are fixed. A door without a door-post to hang upon is not a door at all; while a door-post without the door hanging to it is of no value whatever. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder; and these two He has made inseparable—repentance and faith.⁵

—Charles Spurgeon

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

If you imitate Paul as he imitated Christ, then you will be imitating Christ as he represented God.⁶

—Clement of Alexandria

REFERENCES

1. Thabiti Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 89.
2. Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 705.
3. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 271, quoted in *Faithmapping*, by Daniel Montgomery and Mike Cospers (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 159.
4. Daniel Montgomery and Mike Cospers, *Faithmapping* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 161.
5. C. H. Spurgeon, "Two Essential Things," The Spurgeon Archive [online], 3 March 1889 [cited 16 July 2014]. Available from the Internet: www.spurgeon.org.
6. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.136.5, quoted in *1–2 Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VII in *Ancient Christian Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 103.



Does it feel strange for you to think about telling someone else to imitate your example? Why or why not?

The Bible's impact on a life must be taught and shown. It is not an either/or scenario but rather a both/and blessing. We have a message that must be modeled so that those who are growing will know what it looks like to live out our faith and not just hear a theory about it. Consider the difference between telling someone how to change a tire on their car and showing them how to do it. Think for a moment about how, with no car in sight, you will tell someone how to change a tire. You'd have to describe the tools (a jack, a lug nut wrench). But you might not be sure what type of jack or wrench is in the trunk of their car. Then you'd have to describe where to place the jack, but you're not sure because of the model car that they own. The replacement tire takes a moment to discuss because you're not sure if it is a full-sized tire or a "donut" and where it is located: under the car, in the trunk, or mounted on the back. You can see the point of the illustration. Describing how to do the simple task of changing a tire is a difficult verbal endeavor.

Now apply this idea to living out one's faith in service to God and His mission. Simply describing how to live as a disciple can sound strange. The person who desires to grow needs you to show them how to remove the hubcap without breaking it. The young disciple will need to see you solve the riddle of exactly where you put the car jack under the car so you don't snap off the bumper. Discipleship is a process in which we learn by watching someone else encounter life and apply God's truth to it.

You and I will only go to such lengths of living out our faith so others can imitate Christ's life in us on one condition—we love them deeply.



How will others see Christ in your life this week?

CONCLUSION

Any organization that abandons its core reason for existence, no matter what else they do well, has lost its way. The same is true of the church. We exist to glorify God through the making of more disciples for Christ. As you press into the beautiful adventure of following Jesus, bring along your friends by teaching them the truth and showing them what it looks like to live by Jesus' power.