

The Compass

a tool for disciplers



Equipping Believers for Ministry

The Right Components of Discipleship

What makes for quality discipleship? What are the things within a discipleship relationship that produce real growth and make for an enjoyable, satisfying discipleship experience?

The four Gospels offer fascinating answers when you consider two things: What did Jesus impart to His disciples, and how did He do it? He imparted to them His compassion for the lost and the necessity of servanthood. He demonstrated the importance of His relationship with the Father, and even how to pray. Now consider how He did that – how He imparted these things while teaching in a large group setting, how He told stories to illustrate the kingdom of God, and how He modeled ministry at the very feet of His disciples.

Mark 3:13-14 describes Jesus' method of discipleship: "... He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach." Jesus selected these twelve to spend the next two and a half years with Him, to go wherever He went, and to eventually be sent out into the ministry. Jesus' example is the very nature of discipleship we hope to model.

Here are three components of quality discipleship.

1st Component – Relationship-building

The number one thing that Jesus did was get involved in peoples' lives. When you disciple someone, you're not taking on a project, you're investing in a person. Look at 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, a classic passage where Paul talks vividly about his heart for the people in whom he invested in the city of Thessalonica. "Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (v. 8). These believers at Thessalonica weren't just a crowd of people; they weren't just objects or a project. These were people who Paul deeply loved. No matter how spiritually gifted you may be or how much theology you may know, "People won't care what you know, until they know that you care."

Here are just five ways to build discipleship relationships:

1. *Learn to ask questions* – When you're diving into someone's life, move beyond the superficial questions and more deeply into "soul" questions, like, "What's going on in your soul today?" "How are you doing in your walk with God?" "What are you learning from the Lord?" Ask questions about his or her family. "What was it like at home?" "What were your parents like?" If you have someone who grew up in a home where his father verbally abused him, then that'll probably tell you something about what he may need in his life. If you're discipling someone who was sexually abused, that's something in his life that you're probably going to want to work on with him. Ask questions about the whole person, not just his ministry, but questions about his whole life.
2. *Learn to listen* – It's just as important that we learn to listen as it is to ask questions. One of the things that can make you a notoriously bad discipler is if you sit down with someone and go over your agenda of ten things you want to tell him. You may want to come in with a couple of specific things in mind that you want to communicate. But, first and foremost, you've got to listen to what's going on in his soul. If you're meeting with your disciple, and he's just had a horrible conversation with his parents or spouse or children, but you've planned to dive into some other topic, you'll probably miss something that needs to be processed. Sometimes we have to shut up and simply listen to where the other person is.

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3. *Spend relational time together* – Discipleship should include more than just weekly appointments and Bible studies. Have him over for dinner, play sports together, do things that he would enjoy so he sees your life outside a discipleship setting. Extra time spent together, going to church together, running errands together, and eating together are all ways that you build a relationship.
4. *Learn to be an encourager* – Did you ever notice how much people like to be encouraged? Did you ever notice how much you enjoy being around a person who encourages you? That's an art, a skill. Learn to praise someone for the qualities that God is building into his life. Learn how to identify the good things in a person's life and how to praise and affirm them in a healthy way.
5. *Demonstrate vulnerability* – If you're vulnerable and open about what's going on in your life, if you share your struggles and temptations, it's going to be easier for the person you're discipling to be open. If you come across as a perfect disciple who doesn't have any issues and doesn't have any problems, then they're going to feel that what it means to be a disciple is that they have it all together just like their discipler. No one's got it all together. So be real and honest about what's going on in your life.

While ministering at University of Miami – Ohio, Roger Hershey worked with a guy named Eric, an African-American man who had grown up in inner city Cleveland dealing drugs and hating white men. Roger was twenty-five years older than Eric, Caucasian, and grew up on a farm in rural Pennsylvania. Eric had met the Lord, and the Lord changed his whole life. Roger began discipling Eric his junior year, and Eric became like a son to him. Roger recalls, "I'll never forget the day, as we sat in the dining hall where Eric was an RA, him saying to me, 'Hersh, I want you to know something. Our weekly time together, our discipleship appointment is my favorite time of the week.'

'Really?' Roger said. 'Why is that?'

'Because when we get together every week, I realize this is the safest place I have to be on campus all week long because I know you love me, you believe in me, you'll encourage me, and you'll listen to all my junk, and you'll walk me through my failures and sins, and I know you care.'"

Race, age, background - it doesn't make a difference. When you move into someone's life, when you love them and they know it, they will respond.

2nd Component – The Word of God

Quality discipleship involves getting the Word of God into someone's life. We know what Romans 12:2 says – "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." Don't be conformed to this world - be changed, be transformed. But how? By getting the Word of God in your life, by the renewing your mind with the Word of God.

Here are three reasons why the Word of God is key to discipleship:

1. *God's Word produces life transformation* – People don't change unless the Word of God changes their thinking and changes their perspective on life. Life transformation comes from the Word.
2. *God's Word builds convictions for a lifetime* – We don't want people who have been discipled to do it just because they're involved with our church. We want them to see that these things come from the Scriptures and to have the Word of God build a deep, internalized conviction to live out biblical discipleship for the rest of their lives.
3. *God's Word is the truth* – Every one of us has lies in our belief system, and those lies can only be replaced with the Truth of God's Word.

How do we get the word of God in his life? There are a lot of ways – during your one-on-one appointments with him, worship services, and during Bible study. But here's the good news: you impart God's perspective on life more often than you think. You impart God's perspective when you're running an errand together, hanging out late at night over coffee, or having lunch together. You're sitting around just talking about life, and biblical truth just starts to come out. You start talking about God's perspective on relationships, God's perspective on money, and what



makes you happy. As you involve your disciples in the larger Body, they'll get the word of God in their lives when they attend church services and hear a good sermon. On a retreat, they'll get the Word of God taught to them all weekend long. The responsibility isn't just yours. As you involve them in the larger body, the Word of God comes into their lives.

3rd Component – Doing Ministry Together

Training your disciple in how to have a ministry involves more than simply talking about how great it would be to reach out to people who don't know Christ. Doing ministry together means planning outreaches together and actively sharing your faith with others. Look what Jesus did. He took His disciples and went throughout Galilee and Israel, ministering to people. He spoke to the masses; He healed; He cast out demons; He taught. For two and a half years, Jesus went about ministering, and He took the disciples with Him.

When Paul challenged Timothy in Acts 16, he did not say, "Timothy, let's hide away for three years. I'll teach you everything I know from the Old Testament, give you a crash course in theology, and then you'll be ready for ministry." Instead, Paul said, "Timothy, just go with me," and Timothy joined Paul on his missionary journeys. Timothy learned how to have a ministry by hanging out with Paul. For you and your disciple, ministry may be talking with guys at the basketball court where you're playing hoops. Maybe it's modeling to your disciple how to initiate with a person, build a rapport with them, and transition into the Gospel. Modeling ministry in these ways allows the disciple to see your heart for the lost.

Four things happen when you are in ministry together:

1. *Your view of God develops* – When you and your disciple are sharing your faith, your disciple's view of God will grow because the Lord may just show up and that other person may come to Christ. You may have a great spiritual conversation, and your disciple walks away saying, "Wow, that is cool! Look what God did!" God shows up and works in someone's life when you're in ministry. Not when you sit around and talk about it, but when you get out and do it.
2. *Compassion develops for the lost* – Compassion for lost people really develops when we're eyeball to eyeball with someone, hearing the hurt and pain in his life. Even when we meet someone whose life is all together, who is as happy as can be thinking science has all the answers and dismissing God as totally irrelevant, our compassion grows as we realize how lost he really is.
3. *Your confidence that God will use us grows* – When you go out and share your faith over lunch, or on a summer mission trip, and you see God use you to bring someone to Christ your confidence grows. Or you simply have a great conversation during which the Holy Spirit gives you things to say. He leads you, He recalls Scripture to your mind, and recalls the answers to things you learned in the past. You walk away saying, "Wow, God used even me!" Confidence in God usually grows as you're involved in ministry.
4. *Ministry builds vision and passion* – When disciples are out sharing their faith, it's all they can talk about. There's a passion, a zeal, an excitement. Because when you're discipling and getting involved in a ministry, the disciple is getting in on what God is doing, and that naturally brings excitement. As a discipler, you must love your disciple enough to model ministry in a way that prepares him, increases his confidence that God can use him, and helps him to develop true compassion for the lost.

Healthy discipleship involves all three components – building relationships, studying the Word of God, and doing ministry together. The challenge is to balance all three and periodically evaluate which component needs improvement. There is no perfect discipler. You learn to disciple by doing it. Building relationships and studying God's Word may be easy for you. Ministry is usually the most difficult because it means stepping out in faith and bringing another person along with you. But if we do not embrace all three, we rob people of the privilege of growing, of seeing God show up, of watching God work.

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The Compass is the discipleship curriculum for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this lesson. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org