

What Is a Disciple?

Most of us know that the Great Commission of our Lord in Matthew 28:18-20 commands us to make disciples. Also, we know that the initial stage of disciple-making requires that people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and are baptized. While we have done a relatively good job in these first two arenas of ministry, our efforts in helping people to become functional disciples of our Lord could use some help.

People do not become mature and reproducing followers of Jesus Christ by accident. As the body of Christ it is our responsibility to lead people through a process that enables them to be “fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.” Such a transformation of character obviously begins at salvation. However, many of us know that there are some old habits in our lives that hinder our spiritual maturation process.

In order to keep the cart from getting in front of the horse, we need to define what is meant by a biblical disciple. According to Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary a disciple is one who accepts and assists in the spreading of the teachings of another; a convinced adherent of a school or individual.

Did you notice that a disciple is not simply someone who accepts the teachings of another? As they accept these teachings, they are then involved in the spreading of these teachings that they have learned.

What would motivate someone to “spread the teachings of another”?

Like many of you, I was blessed to be raised in a loving Christian home. My parents not only taught me the truths of God’s word, but they encouraged me to apply it’s teachings in my life. I learned early on that personal Bible study and prayer are essential in helping me to become whom the Lord wants me to be.

In essence, my parents taught me many of the spiritual disciplines that I have continued to apply in my own walk with the Master. At first, these truths were important to me because they were important to my parents. However, as I began to apply them to my own life, they became increasingly important to me.

Many of you have encountered a similar experience to mine. The more you flesh out the teachings of God’s word, the greater the difference these teachings began to make in your life. As time passes they were no longer simply the good ideas from someone else, they grow into convictions in your own life. Thus, your character and attitudes became more in line with His.

Is this not the type of change that we want to see in the lives of all believers? Obviously changes like these don't just happen. They require time, commitment, and an environment where they can be developed.

All of these elements are present in the local church. While we don't have any control as to how people spend their time, we can give them opportunities to mature spiritually. Of course, as church leaders we must make this a priority on our church calendars.

While it is apparent that the commitment of some in the body varies, we must remain committed to the task of making disciples out of those believers with whom our Lord has entrusted us.

When it comes to environment, can you think of a better place for believers to be disciplined than in the local church? After all, we have the tools and resources, as well as those individuals that can provide the believer with the type of nurture and attention that he or she needs to become the disciple that our Lord desires.

To fulfill this important task that Jesus has given us, we must be diligent and consistent in our efforts to provide believers with all that they need to become all that God wants them to be.

If you want to examine the process of making disciples in your local church further, I would like to recommend a couple of resources for you. Dr. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger have recently published a book entitled *Simple Church*. The focus of this book is upon "returning to God's process for making disciples."

Also, check out the LifeWay Discipleship website. There are numerous resources on this site that can help you evaluate and develop your church's efforts in fulfilling the Great Commission. The web address is <http://www.lifeway.com/discipleship>.

Don't forget to look for training opportunities at the regional schools and associational training in your area. Finally, if I can be of any help to you in this process do not hesitate to contact me. My email is mcooper@mobaptist.org and my office phone number is (573) 636-0400 ext. 413.

God bless you as you seek to advance His Kingdom where He has placed you.

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