

DISCIPLESHIP TAKES VISION AND STRATEGY

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

Craig Caster



Discipleship
Pastors
Church Leaders

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

(619) 590-1901
info@FDM.world
www.FDM.world

Discipleship Takes Vision and Strategy by Craig Caster

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INTRODUCTION

Discipleship is at the heart of God's desire for His children. How do we know? Matthew recorded disciple-making as Jesus's last set of instructions to His apostles right before He ascended into heaven.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM) takes this commissioning seriously and has been equipping pastors and lay people for many years. Our aim in this booklet is to help pastors get a vision for discipleship and develop strategies aimed at their particular body of believers. Ultimately, we want to help Christians mature in their faith and learn to disciple others, thereby fulfilling the Great Commission.

This resource takes a biblical perspective on the vital importance of, and need for, effective discipleship strategies. We understand the problems church leaders are facing in today's lukewarm, Christian culture, and we know it can be difficult to decide which discipleship strategies to prioritize and implement in their respective churches. Many times, church leaders err on the side of either believing the teaching from the pulpit is enough, or they think hosting more ministries or home groups is the answer, leaving it up to untrained lay leaders. For discipleship to be truly effective, there must be a clear vision, strategy, and plan in place that will not only edify the believers in your church but will expand the number of believers as well. This is what the Great Commission is all about—edifying and expanding the Kingdom of God.

We pray this booklet will communicate God's perspective on the vital importance of discipleship and the need to implement a vision and a clear strategy for your church—first to your leaders, then to your flock. And we pray that God's desire for true discipleship becomes the vision of your church and the inspiration to move forward. May God bless your efforts and plans.

TODAY'S DISCIPLESHIP

Before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, He commissioned the apostles to make disciples and teach the saints to observe all things included in God's Word. This process was first demonstrated by Jesus during His public ministry, then by his followers to form the early Church. As Christians, we now have this same commission—to make disciples and teach them who God is and how to live for Him. It is a command He tells all believers to follow until the end of the age—our mission while here on earth. But how many churches are currently functioning in the full understanding of Jesus's command? Sadly, not that many. What's going on? Who or what is to blame? Church leadership may place blame for this condition on the laziness of believers or even an unwillingness to just simply obey God's will when faced with the temptations and distractions of the world we live in. But the real problem is not so much laziness or what is happening outside our churches and homes—it is what's not happening within our churches and homes.

We have narrowed down the problems with today's discipleship to three main problems:

1. A lack of understanding about God's priority order for our relationships
2. A lack of understanding about true discipleship
3. A lack of intentionality in our churches and homes

A Lack of Understanding about God's Priority

Evangelical churches embrace Matthew 28:19–20 as Jesus's Great Commission, to seek and save people through preaching the gospel. But the spiritual condition of many professing believers and their families within the body of Christ reflects the sad reality that few Christians have been discipled properly. They don't know what it means to tend to the things God has given them in the proper priority order; that is, "to observe all things that I have commanded you" so that they can abide with God, their spouse, children, and other people in their lives successfully.

Today, many Christians are not walking in God's power because they don't know the importance or necessity of abiding in Jesus daily (John 15:7). Because of this, Christian families are reaping the negative fruit of this neglect. We can see it in the divorce rates, which is rapidly catching up to divorce rates of non-Christians, and we can see it in our children. More and more children from Christian homes are turning to drugs, abusing alcohol, and indulging in sexual sin and unhealthy relationships. Rebellion and disrespect toward parents and authority are now considered common adolescent behavior, even in the church. The fact is, many Christians are spiritually weak, and our families are in serious trouble.

In the beginning, after God created Adam and Eve, He designed the family. It is clear the family unit is important to Him and should be a priority when it comes to a church's

discipleship strategy. Today, many families in the church are failing. Christians are simply ignorant of the instructions God gave them to help build and maintain a healthy family. While churches are not intentionally ignoring these problems, they lack vision for a discipleship model for family ministry and have not defined biblical strategies to equip believers for success. God considers the tending to our families more important than a job, hobby, or even serving at church. Yet most believers do not live this way and have never been disciplined in biblical truths that apply to family life. The family unit is the frontline of ministry for husbands and wives, and God wants us to know and follow the biblical instructions He gave us on how to fulfill these crucial roles. It begins with the family. This is where to start.

A Lack of Understanding about True Discipleship

If you asked a typical Christian to define discipleship, they would likely say it is taking a class for new believers where they learned the foundational doctrines of the faith. This, of course, is of the utmost importance, but it's far more than that. To be disciplined means learning how to be like Jesus—how to correctly tend to everything He has given us and instructed us to do by His grace. The expectation is that at a certain point of maturity, the student will begin to disciple others.

Within Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus reveals the main purpose and priority of the church—to be “the Great Commission.” In light of this truth, we must consider an important question. If making disciples is supposed to be the church's primary purpose and priority, why are so many of today's believers ignorant of what a disciple is and what discipleship really means? And if they do, why have they not answered the call to be one?

Our Lord's obedience was to the complete will of His Father. Today's version of Jesus's Great Commission seems to be, “We must get to work! The heathen is dying without Christ; we must go and tell them about Him.” This is absolutely true, but what about the rest of what verses 19 and 20 say—what about the “teaching”? We must work with God in obedience to His complete will for us as believers and followers of Christ by becoming students of His Word, daily increasing in faith, and examining ourselves to see if God's “priorities” are being worked out within us personally and in our relationship to Him. Once we are trusting God to meet our needs and our priorities line up with His will, He will open the way for us to disciple others. This is the meaning at the heart of Christ's Great Commission.

A Lack of Intentionality in Our Churches and Homes

Discipleship is not optional. All churches and believers must understand we have been given this responsibility of discipleship, a true calling from God, but they don't. Why? Because they don't understand the true purpose and nature of this “discipling” process. Jesus tells us what it is in the Matthew 28 passage. Let's take a closer look.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (verses 19–20)

This Scripture was written originally in Greek, and it is very specific. “Make disciples” is the translation of the verb, and the rest of the sentence supports this action. “Go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” are all participles that refer to the making of disciples. Also, the main emphasis of Jesus’s command is an imperative verb, meaning to give an order or a command, that indicates this discipling is “to do and continue to do.” Therefore, God commands or instructs us to be intentional about discipleship in an ongoing way. Every believer in every church through all time is given this mandate to go, baptize, and teach. But this isn’t typical today.

What we find now, generally speaking, is this Scripture being taught mainly in reference to sharing the gospel of salvation with others, as well as encouraging people to consider the mission field as an area of Christian service. Churches and mission boards support believers as they intentionally “go” out to the nations to share the good news to those perishing in sin, and this is good! But there is another equally important truth revealed in this verse—one that has been somewhat lost among believers and churches today. We have people right now who are struggling within our own churches and homes who need this level of intentionality as well. Jesus’s command includes those in our local sphere of influence, not just those in faraway lands.

These problems are profound and weighty. That’s why FDM has put together a discipleship process which focuses on addressing these issues. Let us show you how you can bring the Great Commission to fruition in our churches and families.

ALIGNING RELATIONAL PRIORITIES

Because we believe that this discipling is essential to the growth that God wants to see for His children, we have developed materials, such as this one, as God has led us. If you do not have a good, biblical discipleship workbook in your church explaining the fundamentals of faith, we offer a start-up workbook for this purpose titled *Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple*, available on our website for free at www.FDM.world.

FDM's approach to true discipleship is threefold:

Part 1: Aligning Relational Priorities

Part 2: Understanding True Discipleship

Part 3: Adopting Christ's Example through Intentional Connection:

Disciple Every Leader

Disciple Every Believer

Aligning Our Priorities

One of the primary benefits of true discipleship is the way it keeps believers connected and accountable to one another, which is in line with scriptural teaching. God does not only want us to hear the Word, but He instructs us to search the Scriptures so we can be ready to help others on their faith journey. God also tells us to confess our sins to one another, to pray for each other, and to support one another in this life as Christians, followers of Christ. To do this well requires personal relationships fostered by fellowshiping or coming together again and again. There is a right way of doing relationship. Not all people in our life carry the same weight or priority. We must align our priority relationships with God's will, which is the first part of the discipleship plan. The Bible is clear about who should hold priority over others, beginning with God.

Many people spend years attending college, studying, and being mentored for a vocation. They look for ways to improve so they can aspire to promotions and more challenging jobs. We practice to get better at sports, hobbies, and read up on information to preserve our physical health. But how much time and effort do we spend getting to know the God who created us—the One who is sovereign over every aspect of life on this planet?

As disciples of Christ, we need to understand the correct priority order of our relationships, and then we need to learn to tend to those things in a righteous way. To “tend” means to take care of or manage something or someone according to its needs, purpose, and priority. Being a student of the Word of God includes learning how to tend correctly to all responsibilities God has given to us. So who are the most important people God has given believers to tend to? What is the correct priority order for our relationships? Let's look at this now.

Our first priority relationship is the one we have with God. We strengthen this relationship by fellowshiping with Him daily, abiding and devoting time to Him. After Jesus died, the temple veil was torn from top to bottom, symbolizing that the separation between God and man had been reconciled. An individual could have direct access and fellowship with God, but only through the forgiveness gained by Christ's death (Matt 27:50-51). This means that we can approach God ourselves, as a child approaches his or her father.

In John 17, Jesus prayed that His disciples could have the same *close relationship* that He had with His father. The language indicates that we, as His children, can address Him as "Daddy," *and can come to Him as a child who crawls right into the lap of a father for encouragement, fellowship, and love.* Christians can do this by learning these principles:

- The importance of setting time aside each day to be with God.
- Talking with God, giving thanks, praising Him, and asking for His help.
- Reading His Word for the purpose of receiving from Him instruction and fellowship.
- Meditating over what is read and even consider the idea of journaling to cement the ideas being taught in our minds.

John 15:7 (NIV) tells us, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." To abide in God is crucial to a successful Christian life. This means "to dwell in constantly; having a close, dependent relationship." When Christians do this, God promises they will bear *much fruit!* They will grow spiritually, just as fruit naturally appears on the vine. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." It is Jesus who is the vine, and we are the branches. Can the fruit grow separate from the vine? The Scripture says, "without Me [Jesus], you can do nothing." How much can we spiritually grow without Him? We can produce nothing on our own. We are totally dependent on God's Holy Spirit, His Word, and His power. We must learn and abide in Christ if we are to tend to our God-given responsibilities.

If married, our spouse has second priority over all relationships after God. It is very clear in Scripture that marriage is a priority to God, yet most Christian couples are ignorant about tending to one another according to God's Word. The divorce rate within the church is a testimony to this fact. Ephesians 5 talks specifically about how husbands and wives are to relate with one another if they are to have a successful marriage.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her. (Ephesians 5: 22-25)

Children are the next priority relationships after God and spouse. Tending to our families is very important to God, for God knows a healthy family unit is the bedrock of society. Many

parents put their relationships they have with their children ahead of their spouse, which is the wrong priority order. Without a strong marriage, the family is in chaos. As the head of the household, God has directed fathers to train up children in the ways of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). I have spoken to many men's groups over the years. I usually ask the following questions to reveal how far we are from teaching God's will concerning tending to our families:

- How many men have had a job for more than ten years? How many went to school or received training to do that job? (Most raise a hand in response.)
- How many feel confident to train another man to do your job? (Again, most will raise a hand.)
- How many have been married for more than ten years? (Usually, more than 75 percent raise a hand.)
- How many feel confident enough to teach another man how to be a husband or parent according to God's Word? (Most of the time, not one hand is raised.)

In summary, I ask another question. "Do you think the Lord is more concerned about your job skills, or about how well you tend to your wife, who is one of His daughters?" One day we will all give an account of how well we tended to the responsibilities God has given us.

Helping your leaders and the people in the congregation understand the correct priority order of their relationships is the first step of discipleship. Why? Because without solid teaching of the relational priority order, people will spend all kinds of energy and time on things that don't matter as much as what God says matters. If we get this part right, all other parts of our lives will line up. For many of us, this is hard stuff. But let me encourage you with this:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.
(Philippians 3:12)

This reminder is not to devastate anyone, because none of us will ever be perfect. But Paul is saying in this verse above, "press on," which means to take God's will to heart and apply ourselves to improve in the future. We all must continue to learn and work out what God tells us to do according to His Word. A disciple is a devoted follower of his master, with the desire to become more like that master. For Christians, becoming more like Christ is the goal.

UNDERSTANDING TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

The second part of the discipleship plan is understanding true discipleship. It is paramount to educate leaders and believers in the church about what discipleship is to fulfill the Great Commission mandate of Matthew 28:19–20. The church is weak in the area of taking the Great Commission to our own people beyond sharing the gospel message with them. It requires teaching and instruction, and edification to know and obey the Word of God. It should be noted that a person can be a disciple only after they have first given their life over to Christ; Matthew 28:19–20 places the emphasis on equipping the saints. That is our target audience—the saints. Let’s look at the following definition of the word disciple.

Disciple: (noun, Greek) *Mathetes* is a student, learner, or pupil, but it means much more in the New Testament. It is a follower who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct. In Classic Greek, a *mathetes* is what we would call “an apprentice,” one who not only learns facts from the teacher but other things such as his attitudes and philosophies. In this way, the *mathetes* was what we might call a “student-companion,” who doesn’t just sit in class listening to lectures, but rather, who follows the teacher to learn life as well as facts and progressively takes on the character of the teacher.

In short, a disciple is a learner, an apprentice, if you will, whose goal is to take on the character of the teacher. So a disciple of Christ, then, is one who is trying to become more Christlike in their attitudes, characteristics, philosophies, viewpoints, and actions. The word “disciple” is mentioned 269 times in the New Testament, which describes a Christian disciple in four distinct ways.

1. A *disciple* has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

According to Scripture, a disciple is a believing and committed follower of Jesus. A potential disciple must first realize they are a sinner under God’s judgment (Romans 3:23; 6:23); they need to confess their sin to God (1 John 1:9); they must repent or turn away from their sin (Matthew 3:2, 8; 4:17; Acts 2:38); and they believe that Jesus’s death on the cross was payment for their sin. When a person truly believes in Jesus, that He was crucified for their sins, buried, and rose from the dead as the Bible describes, then they are restored to a relationship with God and granted eternal life in His presence (Romans 10:9–10; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 2:1–2). At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit enters a person, and the Bible describes this as having the mind of Christ within (Acts 2:38). No person can be a true disciple and child of God without salvation according to God’s plan. And this is

essential before proceeding to teach or disciple because the Bible states that the “natural” or unsaved person cannot understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 1:14, 18).

2. A *disciple* is a student of the Word.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” (John 8:31)

In other words, a disciple invests the necessary time to learn the will of God for every aspect of life. It is the will of God that every believer learns these things:

- The truth about who Jesus is and what He has done
- How to abide in Jesus Christ each day
- The foundational principles of our Christian faith
- The promises to us as His children
- How to walk righteously

We can only learn these things by studying Scripture.

3. A *disciple* is one who receives the Word of God intending to obey and apply what he has learned.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:7-8)

How many Christians today treat the Word of God as a list of suggestions from which they can pick and choose? How many understand that their purpose is to bring glory to God? How many believers use God’s grace as a free ride for being disobedient? Are we grieving over our sin, being serious about repentance and obedience, or are we excusing ourselves for our ignorance and sinful “mistakes”?

Today, within the United States, statistics indicate that over 40 percent of Christians are on prescription anti-depressants. In twenty-plus years of counseling, I have found that a majority of people experiencing depression are either ignorant of, or not tending to, what God has presented in His Word. There is a consequence of living in disobedience. I am not suggesting that all people on anti-depressants are out of God’s will, but chronic attitudes of discontentment, anger, bitterness, fear, and so forth, will lead to depression.

Life may bring overwhelming pressure at times, but praise God He has the answer. Galatians 5:22 tells us that walking in the Spirit will result in a life of love, joy, and peace. This does not happen all at once but will grow as a person seeks to be obedient to God's will. So what happens when a Christian, out of ignorance or rebellion, is not walking in God's will? Just the opposite—love, joy, and peace are replaced by confusion, doubt, anxiety, and eventually depression. Hopefully, the suffering we experience will motivate us to examine ourselves, seek God's will and forgiveness where we strayed, and begin to do His will.

A certain amount of suffering and difficulty in life is normal, to be expected, and even good for turning us from our sin, ignorance, or our independence from God. God allows us to suffer for sin and even disciplines us with circumstances because He is a good, loving father who is faithful in His promise to finish the work He began in each of us.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:
"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives." (Hebrews 12:5-6)

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

A disciple considers the Bible as direct instruction from God to be obeyed. Any awareness of disobedience is a matter for repentance and requires the application of intentional faith, prayer, and dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit to begin to walk in righteousness.

4. A *disciple* will manifest in character and behavior a gradual and consistent transformation into the image of Jesus.

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. (Luke 6:40)

We will never be gods, as some religions have taught in error, and we will never be perfect like Christ. He is our covering for sin, and by His Holy Spirit within us, our words and deeds should be glorifying God more and more over time. Training involves learning, commitment, and practice in righteousness.

Now we know what a disciple is and what characteristics they will have, but what else is involved in true discipleship? Let's look at this now.

Who Is a Discipler?

The Lord gives different gifts to His followers—some are called to be pastors, youth ministers, music directors, and so forth, *but every believer is called to be a discipler*. This means that every Christian needs to come to a point where they are mature enough to apply God's Word to the needs of other believers within a close relationship and do it regularly and with

intention as Jesus did. Discipling is spending time with another, or others, for a season of life, helping them to understand and obey God's Word by encouraging, exhorting, and just as important, *being an example to them*. Remember, Matthew 28:19, says "*make disciples of all.*" In this case, all means all, and that's all that all means!

Are pastors, worship leaders, Bible study leaders, or other lay ministers exempt from this calling? No. In fact, God expects more from those who lead. Take a look at what Scripture says regarding this:

Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. (John 13:16)

In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility. (Titus 2:7)

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. (Hebrews 13:7)

Jesus was the best teacher, but the disciples often asked Him, "What did you mean?" His willingness to stop and explain to them, to answer their questions, demonstrated that other aspects of ministry, such as healing or preaching, were not more important than discipling them! Jesus's life revealed the value and priority God places on discipling others.

Jesus told the apostles to pray for more laborers:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:35-38)

A laborer is a spiritual workman, both a disciple and a discipler. Every believer qualifies in theory for this job of laborer. But how many believers are following Christ so faithfully that they are qualified to lead, teach, or be an example to someone younger in the faith? Every Christian is a potential worker for this labor force. Jesus was hurting for those people then, and He is hurting for people now. It is Jesus Christ who saves a person, and that is where our part begins, discipling them unto maturity as He did. Yes, we need to proclaim the gospel and give invitations to receive Jesus Christ, but equally important is the making of disciples! How do we do this?

To "make a disciple" is to help another become an imitator of Christ. It begins with leadership:

And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12 NASB)

The concept is that as the church leaders live out the Christian life by following the teachings of Jesus closely, they would teach and exhort others to teach and exhort, passing on the knowledge and strength of experience God has worked out in their life. This, then, reproduces faith and maturity in others so they can touch the lives of others in turn (2 Timothy 2:2). As you study the following definition, take special notice of underlined points related to making disciples. If you look closely, you will notice that this definition describes the purpose and process that Christ communicated to His disciples. Take some time to meditate on this definition.

Make Disciples: (verb, Greek) *Matheteuo* means to make a disciple (Matthew 28:19; Acts 14:21); to instruct with the purpose of making a disciple (Matthew 13:52). It is not exactly the same as “make converts,” though it is surely implied. The term “make disciples” places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God¹ by instructing new believers on how to follow Jesus, to submit to Jesus’s lordship, and to take up His mission of compassionate service.² It also involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to teacher and getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative, accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right (Matthew 11:29).³

Paul truly exemplified this behavior throughout his entire ministry. He spent three years at Ephesus personally discipling believers in “the whole counsel of God,” so they would become mature in Christ (Acts 20:27-31). He also disciplined leaders and taught them to do the same, to spend their energy and time teaching other believers (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul and Barnabas returned to the believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch for the purpose of “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). *Strengthening* means they shared the Word of God, while *exhorted* means they urged and encouraged the believers to obey and endure Christ’s commands.

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 999.

² Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 577-78.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 28:19.

ADOPTING CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

The third part of the discipleship plan is adopting Christ's example through intentional connection. Jesus gave us the best example of what it looks like to disciple others:

For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:15–17)

He selected twelve men and taught them personally; they became the founders of His Church after the Holy Spirit came to dwell within them, according to Jesus's promise. These men poured themselves into others as faithful leaders and teachers of all that Jesus had taught them.

Discipling, or discipleship, is the process we follow to help people become imitators of Christ. Even though these specific words are not used in the Bible, the concept is clearly communicated by the way Jesus taught His followers, and throughout Scripture, such as Matthew 28:19–20 and other New Testament verses. Further study will show a connection between the definitions we just learned and the process of discipling, especially as it relates to those within your sphere of influence. This definition of discipling from Greg Ogden⁴ also describes the biblical concepts we should be using as church leaders and believers.

Discipling/Discipleship: “Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.” (emphasis mine)

Although this definition relates to all discipleship, I would like to particularly relate it to leaders in the church and their relationship with the congregation. This picture of discipleship describes what a church should be doing, and defines what Christ did with His disciples. To truly disciple believers means having intentional relationships with them. This is our responsibility. Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, or walk alongside Him, but He was intentional by taking the first step. We must realize that intentional relationships do not happen by accident; there needs to be a predetermined plan that is maintained and consistent. That is what this booklet is about—to give you a plan that will help you begin the discipleship process.

A disciple cannot press on in their faith without investing time and attention to learning. Families are in trouble today because they either are not aware of all the information available to help them, or they are not pressing on by learning and following God's Word.

⁴ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: Revised and Expanded* (Columbia, MD: IVP Connect, 2019).

Many Christian couples are settling for relationships that are far less than what God desires for them. How many just do not know where to get the help they need? It seems that weekend retreats, books, and even counseling are not solving the problems.

Did Jesus indicate the best answer would be in books and retreats? No, He said,

For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.
(John 13:15)

The church needs to understand that retreats and counseling are helpful, but they are no substitute for discipleship when it comes to equipping people for success in the Christian life.

Jesus always advocates personal example and personal relationship as the first battle line against sin. This requires time spent in relationship with someone who is willing to invest themselves in the spiritual growth and progress of another. This is discipleship, the effort of a believer who has been tried through suffering and temptation and has learned obedience—a person who is now able and willing to come alongside another, or others, to guide, teach, and strengthen them.

You only have to take a look at Jesus's life to know how He disciplined others. He constantly ministered to those around Him; His apostles too—they continuously poured their lives into others, teaching and exemplifying God's will. The list of examples is self-evident; discipleship is a pattern Jesus set to be continued by His faithful followers.

As we read the Gospels, we see how Christ poured His life into twelve specific men who He sought out and who agreed to follow Him—He intentionally disciplined them over the course of three years. They learned, watched, asked questions, listened to His teaching, and even began to imitate His behavior. Wherever He went, that was their classroom. Jesus taught them as they went from one life lesson to another; whenever they did not understand something, He stopped and explained (Mark 4:34); He clarified when they didn't understand something (Mark 8:15–21); and He rebuked their lack of faith when they needed it (Mark 9:19–29).

Once Jesus went about in his public ministry, He invited all who came to Him to follow along, with the admonitions, "Follow My example, learn from Me, be My disciple." Likewise, all believers are admonished to follow Christ's example, which means intentionally reaching out to others with a heart committed to disciplining them, to teach and strengthen them in the faith.

In the next section, we will look at two specific groups of people who need our intentionality—the leadership in the church, which includes pastors, deacons, staff, and lay leaders, and then the second group—every believer, our flock. How can we intentionally meet this discipleship need for them? Let's take a look.

DISCIPLE EVERY LEADER

Does effective ministry just happen? No. There must be a vision (Proverbs 29:18) and a specific plan in place. God warns us against confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33); those in leadership know that good intentions can deteriorate into busy activity, clever programs, and other efforts which are only distractions from the main purpose. If we are to fulfill God's calling to discipleship within our churches, there must be vision, strategic planning, and practical implementation.

A leader in the church should know God's Word and be committed to living in obedience and power. No one will ever be perfect, but a believer must understand the life of a disciple and be walking that path to be able to lead another. As our materials demonstrate, there is a process and order for the discipleship ministry. There are many Christians, even leaders in the church, who have not been discipled themselves on the importance of daily devotions, abiding in Christ, the foundational truths of the faith, and the biblical instruction on tending to spouses and children. Therefore, we recommend that leaders go through this training first.

Why is this first? Because believers cannot lead other people into a lifestyle that they do not understand and apply themselves. Unless leaders know and are following God's will and ways in their own lives, there will be serious consequences to the body because their homes are not in order (Titus 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:4-12).

Pastors are encouraged to go through the workbooks we offer and personally experience the fruit of this study themselves. Then, with hope and conviction, you can start discipling your leadership team. We recommend going through our three workbooks: *Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple*, *Marriage Is a Ministry series*, and *Parenting Is a Ministry series*. Free downloads are available at www.FDM.world.

An elder or leader who has gone through a book, is applying the principles faithfully, and is willing to proceed can begin to disciple others. Over the last ten years, we have witnessed this cycle in motion in churches locally, nationally, and abroad. It is bringing hope, transformation and glorifying God's great power in believers who are involved.

While discipling others with this material, follow-up is important to ensure that they are applying the principles in their lives and homes. We have discovered that consistency is difficult without accountability; many Christians, even those in church leadership, do not truly understand the consequences of compromising God's instructions in these areas. A pastor needs to be very diligent and clearly communicate that the truths in God's Word are not just suggestions.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,

The Holy One of Israel:
“I am the LORD your God,
Who teaches you to profit,
Who leads you by the way you should go.
Oh, that you had heeded My commandments!
Then your peace would have been like a river,
And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.
Your descendants also would have been like the sand,
And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand;
His name would not have been cut off
Nor destroyed from before Me.” (Isaiah 48:17–19)

God so wants to be glorified in and through each of His children. It is not busy activity that makes us better ministers for Christ, but it is doing the will of God (1 Samuel 15:22–23). God even gives instruction to pastors regarding the character of those who can be considered for leadership.

For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? (1 Timothy 3:5)

But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. (1 Timothy 3:10)

And let them also be tried and investigated and proved first; then, if they turn out to be above reproach, let them serve [as deacons].
(1 Timothy 3:10 AMPC)

“First be tested” means a season of faithful obedience in tending to and fulfilling the will of God in these specific areas. The pastor has the authority and has been charged by God to disciple his leadership. Those sheep to whom the Lord has given unique gifts for edifying the body must first be disciplined and given a season to demonstrate their intention to be obedient. It is so important that the pastor exhorts his leadership to see these instructions as necessary priorities that need to be implemented in their lives.

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1 Peter 5:1–4)

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:4-8)

It is common for pastors to meet with some opposition when they introduce this material to their leadership. Some may feel overwhelmed, some threatened, and others may consider it unnecessary or think that they don't need help. Reassure the doubters that you are following God's instruction in 1 Timothy 3:1-12 and Titus 2:7. As leaders, they are held responsible by God for every opportunity to give advice, disciple, or counsel someone. It is especially sobering for a pastor to be held accountable for their words and deeds, as they are serving under his approval.

When new people want to become involved in church leadership, either the pastor or a designated person should disciple them through the material and allow a season for observation. They should be faithfully applying the principles and demonstrate an understanding of the truths they have learned before being given a position. We urge you to always take them through all three workbooks even if they are not married or do not have children. This equips them to minister or disciple in areas where the flock may be struggling.

Many pastors have never been disciplined and they have not experienced the impact of a mature believer pouring into them for a season by showing the pattern Jesus established with His disciples. It is not giving someone a book and then randomly meeting with them to ask what they learned. Nor is it having them come to a class or go through a video series on their own. Discipling involves regular reading and meditating on Bible truths together, helping identify problem areas and setting goals, and establishing a basis for accountability. Our workbooks are set up to accomplish this type of fellowship, teaching, and follow-up.

By introducing this material and faithfully applying it, a pastor is following Jesus's example of teaching and training disciples. We know by experience that pastors doing this are seeing wonderful spiritual growth in the flock. We understand that many may feel this process seems like it takes more time than our already busy life allows, but we cannot stress enough that this lifestyle and the biblical truths that come from this practice are life-changing. If our Lord and the apostles used this method of discipling to help believers know and follow God's ways and will, then how can we justify not making the time? Remember, discipling is for every believer and is commanded by God. Leaders are to lead by example.

For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.
Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is

Discipleship Takes Visions and Strategy

he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:15-17)

DISCIPLE EVERY BELIEVER

Jesus's Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20), applies to all believers. Yet most Christians cannot relate to being a disciple, as most consider it an elite group, one for which they do not qualify. Many believe that a discipleship class is one where they would learn the basics of the Christian faith. Many churches consider discipling a one-time class, but this is not what Jesus meant when he said: "make disciples." He is our example, and His approach was more personal and took consistent time. Christ intended his followers to be involved with each other through teaching, encouraging, and holding one another accountable. The Bible talks about praying together and even confessing our sins to one another. How many believers are living this lifestyle, or even know that this is God's plan for them? Every Christian needs to know that Christ has called them to be a disciple. And every Christian needs to know that they also are called to "make disciples." The church is to be a mighty force in this evangelism and equipping of God's children.

In Titus 2:1-10, Paul gives Titus a suggestion for discipling within the church; the older believers are to teach and exhort the younger, making sure that their own behavior is always an example of holiness and good works based on strong doctrine and self-control. And in Hebrews 5:12-14, the author indicates that believers are to mature, not being babes, but able to feed on the meat of God's Word. This kind of spiritual progress is the mark of discipleship. The call is to become involved in the lives of others and to make time and help them to learn how to work out God's will in their life. We also see that the call is not restricted to a pastor and his staff.

What the pastor and his staff owe the flock is a responsibility to put this plan for discipleship in motion. Every believer should be excited at the prospect of becoming a committed disciple of their Lord Jesus Christ. The leadership needs to exemplify this, but without a vision and strategies made clear by the pastor, it will not happen. The workbooks we provide are filled with God's words and truths, tools to use for spiritual growth, for equipping the saints to tend to the three priorities God has put in their life. God speaks of the need for and the value of disciplined living all through His Word. If you follow the instructions and steps set forth in the materials, new patterns will develop, and lives will be changed. The follow-up is an essential part of the process, or strategy, and is based on Scripture; follow-up ensures that discipleship is progressing.

Many churches have specific programs or ministries targeting every life stage of their congregants. This is great, but it's what is being taught in them that really matters. Let's take a look at some of the more typical ministries and how you could apply FDM's materials for your discipleship process in these areas. The goal is to intentionally reach your flock where they are.

Marriage and Parenting Classes

A good way to start the discipleship in this area is to offer quarterly classes that go through each book, as applicable. With this frequency, couples who may need help immediately can get into a new class before problems become more serious. The leader should be someone who is already familiar with the material and working out the principles in their own life. The location is optional, whether at a church or home setting. These classes are great for all ages and stages of marriage, as well as for premarital couples.

As couples become involved in classes, leaders need to be in prayer that God will raise up graduates to be marriage mentors who can come alongside and disciple other couples. It is to be expected that some situations will surface where more focused help is necessary, such as counseling and personal one-to-one discipleship. By now, we pray that you are catching the vision that this can become a fruitful and comprehensive way to minister to your flock. As believers become more involved, they will discover the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given them for the building of the body. As people understand God's will for them as His children, the ministry will multiply and you will witness joy and victorious living among those answering the call to be His disciples.

As part of the follow-up process, be sensitive to the common problem of certain people taking on too much responsibility. Look for the moving of God's Spirit on new people who may not be accustomed to discipling others. Once you have this marriage and parenting ministry in motion, it becomes clear that many of the past hurts for couples have been reactionary; the goal is prevention, not intervention after people are in full crisis mode. Using this material will convince you that the need is real for consistent marriage discipleship rather than unraveling longtime negative patterns and attitudes in the counseling room.

Counseling

Counseling is an excellent opportunity to introduce our biblical workbooks and materials. For example, a couple comes in, and it's obvious that the wife is feeling very resentful, or the husband is a workaholic. When a person comes to a counselor, hopefully, they are willing to do some personal work to solve their problems. Discipleship-focused counseling processes will also reveal the spiritual root of a problem; it exposes the ignorance and sinful habits they have formed. Chasing symptoms or wasting time listening to senseless carnality does not help anyone. The root of most marriage problems is the result of being ignorant of God's will and ways for marriage and selfishness.

The role of a discipleship counselor includes the following:

- Point them to Jesus and His Word for salvation, healing, and instruction.
- Help a person understand why and how the problems exist in their life.
- Teach them to walk in righteousness and tend to the things God has given them, all according to His Word.

- Seek forgiveness and reconciliation where needed.
- Provide love, encouragement, exhortation, and reproof.

Our workbooks are beneficial for both the counselor and counselee. They are organized in a way to teach God's truth with personal applications and assignments to help them understand and apply what they learn. People who truly want to change will make time to do the work each week. Remember, God won't do by miracle what we are to do by obedience. If they won't do their homework, then what can you do for them? It is God's Word combined with their desire to follow His will that brings about change.

A person who is unwilling to do their homework but wants to consume your time by complaining, judging others, or making excuses about why they can't do what God clearly tells them, are just indirectly mocking God. God is not a liar; His Word, the Holy Spirit and a will to obey is all one needs to be set free and put their lives in order. You need to stand on that truth.

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint;
But happy is he who keeps the law. (Proverbs 29:18)

Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God], the people perish; but he who keeps the law [of God, which includes that of man]—blessed (happy, fortunate, and enviable) is he. (Proverbs 29:18 AMPC)

Pray and seek the Lord's guidance for raising up disciples to help counsel and disciple others. Counselors must be equipped with discipleship tools and appropriate workbooks that cover a broader area than, for example, resentment, anger, or communication skills. Often, particular problems are symptoms of ignorance in other areas of life, including marriage, parenting, or unforgiveness. Dealing with one issue (may) not address the root causes of a dysfunctional spiritual life. Remember, most problems stem from ignorance, rebellion, or spiritual issues. God has the answer for anyone who will learn and desires to follow Him.

Good counseling will do the following:

1. It will bring an understanding of the origin of the problem: sin, which comes from disobedience, ignorance of some area of God's Word (or unforgiveness).
2. It will identify the fruit resulting from the problem: sinful attitudes, behaviors, wrong disposition, anger, ungodly habits, strongholds, poor communication, and so forth.

Good biblical-based workbooks will assist you in defining God's principles and addressing the origin of the problem(s). They will provide instruction on the correct thinking and behavior. (And of course, this includes marriage and parenting issues.) Our free online materials will assist you in your counseling. Find them at www.FDM.world.

Family Ministries

In a baby dedication, you are asking God to bless a child and family, but this also is a public statement by the parents of their intention to dedicate the child unto the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). The premise of this is to raise a child as the Lord instructs in His Word. We, the church, must take this public dedication seriously, and if we do, we will have a plan in place that provides biblical instruction on how to raise a child. As you will learn from our workbooks, this involves more than bringing them to Sunday school, church, or even having devotionals at home. Parenting is challenging, and if the parents are not abiding in Jesus daily as a couple and working out His will, how can they be successful?

As we mentioned before, people train for their vocations, some for many years, and it also takes time and experience before an employer gives an employee much responsibility. Most parents have no training in parenting despite the fact that God's Word is full of instruction. Before dedicating a baby, church leaders should provide either a small group parenting class or a discipler to take them through a parenting workbook. Teaching parents how to create a loving atmosphere at home, disciple their own children, prayer time, and having a unified and proper discipline plan is vitally important to a child's development. Statistics show that when most of today's children leave home, they are increasingly walking away from faith in God.

As people experience the blessings of discipleship in these areas, it also lays a foundational understanding and vision for discipling others. As you explain that this child is dedicated to God because he/she is actually a gift placed within their care, to be raised according to His instruction, they will see the need for being disciplined.

Again, parents must be an example of personal holiness themselves, or the application of parenting principles will not be as effective. Discipling is not providing the video series and workbooks to go through on their own but requires that someone follow-up with them after each lesson. When people are not assisted, they often stray in their commitment of time and can also be distracted by information from nonbiblical sources. Also, there are steps that need to be followed and consistency is often difficult.

Youth Ministries & Mentoring

A youth pastor often has important insight into the families of children he is pastoring. It is important to establish communication between the youth pastor, the family pastor (if applicable), and the senior pastor to identify those experiencing problems. This helps with efforts to reach families struggling with parenting issues. Paul told the Ephesian leaders:

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

This is why it is so important to train youth pastors and assistants in both personal discipleship and God's plan for raising children. Youth pastors need this training to

effectively minister by identifying problems and offering biblical solutions or referring parents to people who can disciple them in this area.

It is common for parents to call or meet with the youth pastor for perspective or even advice on dealing with a child. A youth pastor often has the opportunity to help a child stay connected to the Lord and their parents as well. The senior pastor needs to train the youth pastor who is representing not only the church but God. You want to make sure they are giving correct counsel to youth and parents seeking help. Can you see how the discipleship process creates a network of spiritual connection and unification within a church, both in the leadership and among the flock? This is how God intends for His children to be edified.

There are many single-parent families in society, as well as many youths with non-Christian parents. Ministering to these children is the basis and primary focus for a youth mentoring ministry, which is a great way to share the love of Christ with a child with a fractured relationship with an absent father or mother, or no Christian influence in the home (James 1:27). Pray and seek the Lord's guidance for raising up a youth mentoring coordinator with the spiritual gifts and heart to reach these children. Visit our website www.FDM.world for a guide on how to establish this ministry.

Men's or Women's Ministry

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (Titus 2:1-8 ESV)

This passage of Scripture provides a great vision for a men's or women's ministry in a church. This is a picture of mature Christian men and women teaching the younger and less spiritually mature believers to walk in righteousness and tend to the things God has given them according to the instructions found in His Word. It is very clear a priority is to teach them how to tend to a family as a spouse and parent.

It is the senior pastor's responsibility to set the priorities to what is being taught in all ministries in the church, including the men's and women's ministry.

GETTING STARTED

Pray. The Bible says that we not only wrestle against our flesh but also against spiritual principalities and powers of darkness. Satan has caused blindness, distraction, and confusion in these areas of discipleship; pray for God's truth to triumph in our churches and homes, and to raise up many disciples.

Train the leaders. Pastors and leaders, it starts with you. Lay out a vision and strategy for discipleship in your congregation. Instruction about God's relational priority order, understanding what true discipleship means and who it's for, and adopting Christ's example for discipleship by intentionally connecting to people are all part of a good discipleship plan. Teach them about abiding in Christ—the top priority after salvation, followed by teaching important foundational truths of the Christian faith, tending to a marriage, and parenting, which are clear priorities to God. Remember, 1 Timothy 3:4–5 says that when a leader's home is not in order, their ministry will be weak.

Designate a pastor or lay minister to oversee the ministry. Discipleship is God's will for every believer but, in many cases, it is a new concept. The vision for establishing a priority focus of the church comes from the pastor through preaching and exhortation of the congregation; the importance of discipling must be communicated and a strategy implemented.

We highly recommend using our workbooks: Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple, Marriage Is a Ministry series, and Parenting Is a Ministry series. Free downloads are available at www.FDM.world.

A CALL TO ACTION

It is a great blessing to disciple others, to witness the power of God transforming another person, and to see God healing and strengthening families.

From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
(Ephesians 4:16)

Did you catch that? “Every part does its share,” so we each need to accept this call and do our part. This promise is that obedience brings blessing, and every believer wants to be blessed.

Strong families are critical. We find in the first two chapters of the Bible that the family is the first institution that God created. Both the Old and New Testaments begin with stories of family. The nation of Israel grew from one family. In fact, the first mention of love is found in Genesis 22:2, where we learn of Abraham’s love for his son. In Deuteronomy 6:1–9, God made it clear that Israel’s survival as a nation required parents to disciple and train their children, raising them according to His instructions. Our Savior came into this world through a family and performed His first miracle at a wedding.

The sanctity of marriage is illustrated in Ephesians 5:25, when God exhorts a husband to love his wife in the same way He sacrificially loves His Church. In verse 22, God calls wives to affirm, honor, and submit to their husbands in order to show the world what God desires from His saints in return. These are just a few of the examples that point to the importance God places on the institution of the family. And, if the family is a priority for God, then it should also be a priority for the church.

Over the years, churches have progressed in ministry to children and youth by going beyond just having “Sunday school” and hiring youth pastors to develop groups and activities. It’s clear that churches have made youth a priority; however, many have done little that is specifically aimed at teaching and enriching the marriages and parents that make up the families of those children. Focus as much attention on husbands, wives, and parenting as we do on youth, and we will see real change in families and the church body. Statistics show that children parented according to biblical principles by parents who reflect Christ in their own lives are more likely to live for Christ after they leave home.

The Bible is the best marriage and parenting manual ever written, but the instruction is scattered throughout it. When we are focusing on a particular topic for study and instruction, it is very helpful to have workbooks. The organization of principles, commands and also some guided questions can bring great success to the process of discipling people within the church. Christian’s who have been equipped with these tools and have had a

season to work them out in their own life, can then step forward to disciple others helping them to work through marriage and parenting issues. This is the way we will see families edified and glorifying God. The church needs a fresh vision of discipleship with clear priorities if we truly want to change the destructive direction of so many Christian families.

Ask yourself these sobering questions:

- Why do most Christians not understand what it means to be a disciple, or how one goes about becoming a disciple?
- Why do many Christians not tend to the most important privilege they receive with salvation, the opportunity to be with Jesus every day in study and prayer (devotional)?
- Why are many Christians ignorant of the fact that abiding in Christ each day is the place where we receive the power to obey Him?
- Why are so many Christian families hurting and in trouble?
- Has the church lowered standards on what constitutes a healthy family?
- Is the church successful when many Christians do not know how to abide in Christ daily and their families are out of God's will and failing?
- Is the church successful when a large percentage of its people are ignorant of God's design and instruction for being a disciple, husband, wife, and parent?
- Do churches recognize that conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit, and discipleship is God's design for edifying His people, which is our part?
- Is the church's main purpose to facilitate the spiritual growth—discipleship?

We can all agree that the goal of evangelism is salvation in Jesus Christ. And we can all agree that this is just the beginning of a life that Scripture calls "abiding in Christ" (John 15:1-8). This is the lifestyle of a disciple of Christ; but just as the spreading of the gospel requires human effort, so does the process of Christian growth. This is where discipling becomes essential and is a responsibility given to us by Jesus in His Great Commission. Discipleship is a process with a goal; a personal relationship between believers who are encouraging one another to enter into an intimate, abiding relationship with Jesus Christ, to grow in spiritual maturity, and learn how to tend to the things God has given us in His Word. This involves doctrine, instruction, prayer, encouragement, accountability, reproof, correction, time, and commitment.

Jesus asks us to spread the gospel and make disciples. The most powerful and effective evangelism will result when Christians are abiding in Christ and following God's Word in obedience to His will. It is then that our lives will reflect and glorify the true and living God to a dark and dying world. It is my prayer that this information on discipleship will inspire you as a church, bring a new or renewed vision, and that the Lord will raise up many disciples to come alongside others, willing to teach, encourage and exemplify the life of abiding in Jesus and His Word.

I pray that this information has blessed and encouraged you. Please let us know if we can help establish an ongoing discipleship ministry in your church. Our materials are being used

worldwide, and we currently have much of it translated into Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. God is blessing people around the world with the truths contained in our workbooks, and we are continually reaching out to new countries by conducting conferences and helping churches get started with integrating a discipleship model.

May the Lord bless you, your family, and your ministry in Christ,

Pastor Craig Caster
FDM Founder

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the United States and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2 Peter 1:1-8)

ABOUT FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families through a discipleship model. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on discipleship, marriage, and parenting.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches across the United States and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at www.FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at www.FDM.world.