

HANDBOOK FOR DISCIPLESHP

PART 1

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH

THE TEACHING MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

At conversion a transformation occurs. The convert has new desires and new priorities—the change is so great that the Bible describes him as a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But, some things take time. The convert does not immediately see how to apply Christian principles to all parts of his life. He has to learn the principles, then see ways to apply them.

There is also a process of personal spiritual maturation. The new convert is an infant in Christ.

- » Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-2. According to these verses, what is typical of a new convert?
- » Read Hebrews 5:13-14. What is the milk the verses talk about? What is the meat? What is a characteristic of spiritual maturity?
- » Read Matthew 28:18-20. In this passage, what responsibility did Jesus give beyond evangelism?

Before giving the Great Commission, Jesus stated that he has all authority in heaven and earth. Then he gave the church the responsibility to bring people into obedience to his authority.

Jesus told the disciples not only to preach the gospel, but to teach all the things he had commanded. Evangelism is only the first part of the task. Teaching converts to obey all of Jesus’ commands is the process of discipleship. To fail in discipleship is as serious as to fail in evangelism.

The teaching ministry of the church is to bring converts to spiritual maturity.

In Ephesians we are told that God calls people to special roles of ministry for the purpose of building up believers so that they are no longer children (Ephesians 4:11-14). A result of their reaching spiritual adulthood is doctrinal stability.

A pastor is especially responsible for discipleship. Paul told Timothy, “...devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13). He was not referring to Timothy’s personal study; he was talking about ministry. Timothy’s ministry was to focus on reading and explaining scripture, giving spiritual direction, and teaching Christian doctrine. One of the qualifications of a pastor is that he be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2).

Because learning is part of spiritual formation, teaching is part of the work of discipleship. Teachers are important in the church, and the church must always be working to develop teachers.

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). This instruction was given by Paul to Timothy, as from an experienced evangelist and pastor to a younger minister. Paul was not confident that the faith would be passed down by preaching only. Individuals would need to be trained with special effort and be prepared to train others. If such training would not be accomplished by preaching to the congregation, these faithful men would have to be trained individually or in small groups.

There is a lot of teaching to do. What pastor has time to do it all, especially since not everyone is ready for the same instruction at the same time? But Ephesians 4:11 doesn’t say, “He gave a pastor” (only one person and only one role). Instead, there are various roles and several people to fill them. God calls teachers, gives them teaching ability, and equips them through the church for a teaching ministry.

“The initial objective of Jesus’ plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father.”

Robert Coleman

The Master’s Plan

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

True discipleship is more than teaching information; it includes the shaping of values, priorities, attitudes, and lifestyle. This process can happen only in a Christian community with spiritual accountability.

We see throughout scripture that God intended that people live in community, beginning with God’s statement that Adam should not be alone (Genesis 2:18).

Some advantages of community are described in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”

God told Moses that his plan for Israel was that they be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). The heritage was to be passed down through families, described in what is called the “Great Commandment” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

The Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers to use those terms in the New Testament to refer to the church (1 Peter 2:9).

God always intended for the people who are in relationship with him to also be in relationship with each other. Our relationship with God forms us into a community of faith. Just as our relationship with God calls for commitment, our relationship with the people of God calls for commitment. It is wrong for a person to think he can be in right relationship with God but choose not to be in relationship with God’s people.

Paul used the metaphor of the body to describe the relationship among members of the church (1 Corinthians 12). No member can function properly if it tries to be independent of the body. Members must cooperate and care for one another, or there will be no body. If one member is harmed, all suffer. A member’s actions affect the whole body. Paul spoke of this when he dealt with the situation of the man in an immoral relationship, although he used the metaphor of bread instead. He said, “...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6). We must see ourselves as vital parts of a Christian community.

Many New Testament commands cannot be obeyed without a sense of community. To fulfill the commands of God, Christians must live in commitment to one another. This means that Christian community leads to spiritual accountability.

We find many places in the Bible where Christian community is connected to spiritual accountability.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).

This verse tells believers to submit to those in positions of spiritual authority. The command also gives a great responsibility to spiritual leaders. Their responsibility is not just to lead by authority, but to watch for the souls under their care. To do that, they must be well enough acquainted with their people to give individual spiritual direction, and they must have a relationship with their people that makes such direction possible.

Christian community and spiritual accountability are described also in this passage:

- » Read Hebrews 10:24-26. What is commanded in this passage?

We are commanded here to be aware of other Christians' needs and to encourage them up to do what is right.

- » Describe the relationship that would be necessary among believers for them to fulfill this responsibility.

Our encouragement is not effective if we do not have the right relationship with others. We have to know them well and show love and concern. Otherwise, they are offended by personal advice.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12-13).

We are called to hold one another accountable. The exhorting here must go beyond scheduled meetings of the entire church body, for we are commanded to exhort daily. This requires fellowship on an individual or small group basis. Fellowship of this kind would not merely be eating together or visiting, but would have a spiritual purpose. To accomplish this purpose, we must purposefully plan conversations and small group meetings with that priority.

The way that we can benefit one another is illustrated in Proverbs 27:17:

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

One person need not be superior to another before benefiting him with spiritual direction and encouragement. In fact, spiritual direction given humbly is more likely to be accepted.

...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:16).

Confession of personal faults will not ordinarily happen in large groups; therefore, this command is not easily carried out in church services. The context shows the reason for the command: that those who have erred may be restored.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Often a Christian feels that nobody cares what he is going through. Fellow Christians would care if they could really understand what he is suffering, but they usually do not know him well enough to understand. How can we bear another's burdens if we don't really know what they are?

In the early days after the birth of the church, a close relationship among believers was the norm.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts (Acts 2:46).

John Wesley said that there is no such thing as individual Christianity.

» What do you think Wesley meant by his statement?

Spiritual accountability occurs in a healthy Christian community.

To have spiritual accountability is to establish a relationship with a person or group to whom we report our spiritual condition, our success or failure in spiritual disciplines, and our commitments for development.

Without spiritual accountability we will not fulfill all of the commands of scripture, and we will neglect a means that God has designed for giving us grace.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

What does it mean to be spiritually mature? How would you describe a mature Christian?

Because maturity takes time, it tends to come with age (Titus 2:1-5). Obviously, some people get older without maturing spiritually like they should, and there are young people that demonstrate unusual maturity.

Most characteristics of maturity are not completely achieved at a certain point, but are gradually increased. At times they may increase suddenly because of a spiritual experience or an experience in life. Even though a person should continue to develop all of his life, there is a level he can reach that can be called spiritual maturity.

Characteristics of spiritual maturity are described in several scripture passages.

» Read Ephesians 4:11-14, Hebrews 5:12-6:1, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, 1 John 2:12-14.

Below is a list of characteristics that are signs of spiritual maturity. It is not a complete list, and some points in the list are not completely distinguishable from other points.

A mature Christian may not demonstrate all of these characteristics completely, but is growing. He may not realize some of his faults, but will respond to the continuous work of the Holy Spirit in his heart.

TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1. Christlikeness in motives, attitudes, and actions

Christlikeness comes from the passion to know Christ in his nature, by spiritually experiencing his death and resurrection (Philippians 3:10). It may include sharing his suffering in persecution. A person who loves Christ like this will be transformed to be like him.

To be like Christ is to be motivated by love and not by selfishness or pride. A Christian wants to be like Christ and is sad any time he realizes he was not like Christ in something he said or did.

2. Close relationship with God

A person should grow closer in his relationship to God. Signs of a good relationship with God are enjoyment of God's presence, love for God's Word, and time spent in prayer.

3. Demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit produces fruit in the life of the believer, which includes love, joy, patience, and self-control. A believer becomes more consistently kind and gentle as he lets the Holy Spirit work in his temperament.

4. Victory over outward and inner sin

The believer learns how to depend on God for victory over temptation. He yields to God's cleansing so he can have a holy heart. He develops habits and disciplines that help him live consistently in victory.

If he yields to a temptation, he confesses it to God and prays for forgiveness and strength. He should share his failures with close Christian friends who pray for him (James 5:16).

5. Spiritual disciplines established

Spiritual disciplines are ways to practice making our relationship with God the first priority. A person who does not consistently pray, read the Bible, and attend church is not a mature Christian.

6. Developed Christian character

A Christian learns to pattern his life on principles of honesty, reliability, and faithful work.

7. Consistent Christian living

A believer learns to apply Christian principles to life. A mature Christian should want to look like a Christian all the time in his behavior and attitudes. As he realizes that something he says or does is not consistent with love in his heart, he depends on God's strength to make changes.

8. Healthy relationships

A mature Christian develops deep friendships with other Christians. He maintains relationships by showing honesty, patience, and forgiveness. He is humble and admits mistakes. Because he may misunderstand a situation, he may not be as patient as he should, admit a mistake quickly, or have the right opinion about another person.

9. A personal ministry

A believer should identify his spiritual gifts. He should find his place in the church to be a blessing to others. A believer can minister in the church by helping to evangelize and disciple others in the Christian life.

10. Endurance of hard conditions

A believer should learn to trust God when bad things happen. He should depend on God when he is in difficult situations. A mature believer does not lose faith when he does not understand why something is happening.

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of spiritual maturity do not depend on natural talent.

They are not the same as ministry skills.

They do not necessarily accompany leadership ability. It is good if a leader is spiritually mature, but sometimes a person becomes a leader because of his abilities, while he is still not spiritually mature. Sometimes a person is spiritually mature, but does not have leadership ability.

Certain personality types seem naturally more patient and kind. Natural traits of personality are not the same as spiritual maturity. God works in our personalities and helps bring balance to our tendencies. If we analyze a particular person, we cannot distinguish exactly between his natural personality and the characteristics of spiritual development.

Health problems may also affect a person's discernment and reactions. We should not be quick to judge others.

APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. Examine yourself by the ten characteristics of spiritual maturity. Prayerfully consider which ones you lack the most. Plan how to purposely develop in those, through prayer, study, counsel from others, and dependence on God's help.
2. How can a church purposely fulfill its responsibility for teaching and spiritual accountability? Write two pages describing a plan of action for a church.

PART 2

SMALL GROUP DISCIPLESHIP

THE VALUE OF SMALL GROUPS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Small group ministry takes many forms around the world. There are many types of small groups, designed for different purposes. Small groups may meet for study, spiritual accountability, ministry, prayer, or special projects.

Some churches are divided into groups that meet in homes. The groups function like small churches. The churches of the New Testament apparently functioned like this.

Growing, effective churches usually have some kind of small group system.

In this section, we will talk about the effectiveness of small groups for discipleship.

THE WESLEYAN MODEL

John Wesley (Great Britain, 18th century) was not the first to organize small groups, but he developed a system that was highly effective.

Wesley developed a system of discipleship with various sizes of groups called societies, classes, and bands.¹ Wesley's methods were not a complete system at the beginning, but were developed gradually to meet needs. Many of Wesley's converts asked for encouragement, advice, and prayer. Because there were so many, he arranged for them to meet every Thursday.

In each place that Wesley and his preachers took the gospel, they organized converts into groups that met regularly. Because the congregations were large, many could not tell about personal spiritual needs and were not getting the attention they needed. Smaller groups were formed called classes, where leaders served as pastors to encourage and guide the members. Any member who continued in open sin and did not change was removed from membership and not allowed to come to the meeting.

Groups smaller than classes were formed so members could share their spiritual struggles and provide each other with spiritual accountability. These small groups were called bands.

1 See "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume VIII* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 249-258.

In these meetings the leader would describe his own spiritual condition, then ask others searching questions concerning their condition, sins, and temptations. In these groups, the members were all of the same gender.

Wesley's success caused the famous George Whitefield to make this statement: "My Brother Wesley acted wisely—the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruit of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are as a rope of sand." Wesley's methods were continued by the American Methodist church in the early years, but both his discipleship principles and his doctrines have been neglected by modern Methodism.

UNDERSTANDING THE ESSENTIAL CHURCH

The earliest church building that has been found was built at approximately A.D. 250. For the first two centuries, the church saw itself as people, not as a building or organization. The church is composed of the groups of Christians that worship together, evangelize, and obey the Bible.

Small groups of people are the basic building blocks of every effective church structure. A small group discipleship program is not a new institution that will someday become obsolete. It is not a new method that may work in some places and not in others. Instead, small groups are the basic building blocks of the church. Ministry in small groups can be done in various ways to meet the challenges that any local church faces.

A church will not accomplish its purpose unless its people are regularly edified and trained in a setting more personal than the whole congregation or most Sunday schools.

A Caution

Small groups are only as spiritual as the people involved. If they are not committed disciples with the priority of pleasing God, living faithfully, and accomplishing the mission of the church, there are many ways for the group to go wrong.

THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

To have spiritual accountability is to establish a relationship with a person or group to whom you report your spiritual condition, your success or failure in spiritual disciplines, and your commitments for development. They tell you when they think you are doing wrong. You tell them your commitments, and they ask you later if you are keeping your commitments.

The biblical basis for spiritual accountability in a healthy Christian community is more thoroughly explained in a previous section. Without spiritual accountability, we will not

fulfill all of the commands of scripture; and, we will neglect a means that God has designed for giving us grace.

...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed... (James 5:16).

A person will not confess private faults except in a relationship that makes it easy. If he is not confessing to someone who is praying for his faults, he is neglecting the means God has designed for meeting those needs.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Unless we know someone very well, we do not know what his most serious burdens are. We cannot fulfill this scriptural command without being in a relationship that makes it possible.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

We are to examine one another closely with a motive of love in order to see what encouragement and reproofs are necessary. Encouragements will be shallow, and reproofs will be resisted unless we have a special relationship with the other person.

The following questions can help a person determine whether or not spiritual accountability is established in his life.

What relationships do I have which make it possible that someone is helping me bear my most serious burdens, I am confessing my faults to someone, I am helping someone with his burdens, and someone is responding to my present spiritual condition?

Are there times when there is nobody I can lean on, times when I am glad that nobody knows my condition, and times I would be embarrassed to report my prayer time or Bible study time?

Most churches do not fulfill their responsibility of spiritual accountability unless they arrange a system for doing so. For many, that is a system of small groups.

QUALIFICATIONS OF A SMALL GROUP LEADER

Jesus demonstrated the priority of discipleship. From the beginning of his ministry he chose a few men who would receive the responsibility of guiding the church. He did not spend all of his time preaching to the thousands who followed him; instead, he was often taking time to train the twelve. He extended his ministry through those that he trained.

A person who does discipleship should have the following characteristics. He may not excel in every quality, but should try to improve in them all. If he lacks any one of them, he will be much less effective.

1. **Spiritually mature.** He should have the qualities of spiritual maturity described in a previous section. If he is not spiritually mature, he will not set a good example and will not have the experience he needs.
2. **Available.** If his schedule is already too full and not well managed, he is not available for small group ministry. He must make it a priority.
3. **Reliable.** He must be a person who fulfills his commitments. He must be able to keep appointments. He must be able to remember to hold others accountable for their commitments.
4. **Confident.** He must believe that he is able to learn how to lead a group. If he has the ability but does not believe it, he first needs some guided experiences that will build his confidence.
5. **Able to resolve conflict.** He needs to be able to keep the right attitude when people disagree and cause problems. He needs to be able to help resolve conflicts between others.
6. **Able to teach.** Do people understand his explanations? A leader must be one who does not confuse people.
7. **Hungry for God's Word.** He must have an enjoyment of God's Word, so he can invite others to enjoy it also. He must make the Bible important in his relationship with God.
8. **Dependent on God.** He must realize that spiritual results can happen only by the work of the Holy Spirit. He must be ready to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. He must depend on anointing from God. He must not be confident that his explanations will succeed because of his ability alone.
9. **Ready to serve.** He must be a person who feels that he is doing something valuable when he serves others. He should not be a person who wants to be served. He should

"Though he did what he could to help the multitudes, he had to devote himself primarily to a few men, rather than to the masses, in order that the masses could at last be saved. This was the genius of his strategy."

Robert Coleman

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not be looking for a ministry for the purpose of displaying his talents. He must be responsive to needs and ready to volunteer.

10. **Under spiritual authority.** He should be spiritually accountable to someone. He should follow the direction of spiritual leaders.
11. **Faithful to the church.** The group leader should be a committed member of a local church. The ministry of discipleship should cause people to appreciate the church and become more committed to it.
12. **Zealous to succeed.** If he has zeal to succeed, he will not quickly give up. He will adapt to circumstances. He will look for information to help him be more effective. He will take initiative when there are problems or opportunities. He will have energy and enthusiasm.
13. **Doctrinally accurate.** He should have a good foundation of biblical, evangelical doctrine.
14. **Trained for ministry.** It is not necessary for ministry training to occur in an academic institution. Training starts with observation, as a believer sees how ministry is done. Training increases with participation, as he is given responsibilities under direction. Reading and study of good material is very important.

DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

The best way for discipleship to happen is by a local church that understands the responsibility and priority of discipleship, working in unity.

Therefore, these directions are addressed to the leaders and committed members of a church.

If a church realizes that they need to do better at discipleship, they should first study the scriptures and points in this course about discipleship. Leaders can present the material. All the committed members of the church should be involved if possible, so they can share the vision.

A second part of development is to observe what the church is already doing. Most churches have some groups already operating, even if they have not purposely started a small group program. For example, there may be a group of musicians in the church that meets frequently. There may be a choir that practices. There may be a board of deacons. There may be Sunday school classes, and the Sunday school teachers may also form a group. The youth of the church may meet occasionally. Committees may exist to take care of various responsibilities. A group may form informally of people who work together on a project. There

may be families of the church that occasionally get together for fellowship. There may be home Bible studies and prayer meetings.

These groups may not have formed for the purposes of discipleship or spiritual accountability, but they may help serve those purposes. Any church that has spiritual life already has some groups operating to support that life. When a church decides to improve its program for discipleship, it should examine the existing groups and discover what is happening, then think about how the purposes can be achieved better.

New groups may be needed. Maybe different kinds of groups are needed. There may be groups that give practical training for ministry. There may be groups that primarily study the Bible and pray. There may be small groups for serious spiritual accountability.

The purpose of the group determines who should be there and how the group should function. For example, a group for serious spiritual accountability should have fewer than ten people. If the group is too large, confidentiality is reduced, sharing becomes shallow, greater control is necessary, less participation is possible, and attendance tends to be worse. The depth of the personal sharing will be limited if both men and women are present.

The purpose of the group determines whether or not it should be open to new members. If the purpose is spiritual accountability, it should not be adding new members after the group has met several times. Most people will not share about their spiritual condition until they feel secure with the others in the group. If the purpose of the group is to cover a series of lessons, it is not practical to be adding people throughout the series of meetings.

There may be a group for new converts. It is important that a new convert not wait for several weeks to join a group. Therefore, this group needs a revolving series of lessons so that new people can join at any time. The leaders must realize that some new converts will drop out. The fact that some people leave the group does not mean the group is not doing well. Even though some will drop out, a new convert group should be open to new people.

If a group is for ministry training or deeper spiritual development, the group members must be people who desire to grow spiritually and are willing to commit to the goals of the group. If some of the members are not committed, the group will not do as well at achieving its purpose.

Most members must be recruited by personal invitation. Do not wait for people to ask to join.

Not everyone in the church will get involved in a small group program. If you are a leader in the church, do not drive people away by criticizing them for not being in a small group. Promote the group ministry by describing its benefits.

At the first meeting, make sure everyone understands the importance of the group. Share scripture and information that shows the importance of discipleship.

To help attendance, the group can be scheduled to meet for a certain number of weeks. Explain that the group is covering a specific series of lessons and tell them when the series will be finished. That way, each member knows exactly what he is committing to. Emphasize the need for perfect attendance. At the end of that time, the group can start again with those who want to continue.

SCENARIO FOR CONSIDERATION

Andre has been a Christian for several years. He is a church member and helps in his church. He is concerned that his church does not have a plan for discipleship. He thinks the church should start small groups, but the leaders are not interested.

» What should Andre do?

Andre should talk to the church leaders and ask their approval to lead a small group. He should not criticize the ministry of the church, but instead describe the benefits that would come from the group. If the group does well, the church will begin to understand the benefits of that kind of ministry.

LEADING AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

At the beginning of a group, there is excitement and expectation. Many members do not know exactly what to expect, but they hope to get help from the group.

The following directions will help the group to be effective and fulfill its purpose. There are important principles for the functioning of small groups. If the leader helps the group to follow these principles, he will reduce frustration and discouragement.

The first meeting may be different from the others because the group is learning how the meetings will be done. However, the first meeting will set the style for future meetings. If a person does not talk in the first meeting, he will expect to be silent in the future. If someone dominates the discussion, the group will expect future meetings to be dominated by the same person. If the meeting is disorderly, they will expect the same in the future. If the meeting is like a class with little participation, they will expect the same pattern.

Some members may drop out after a few meetings because the group is not what they expected. It is important to lead the meeting properly so that the members who were expecting the right things will not be disappointed.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVENESS

- 1. Schedule the group to meet weekly, if possible. Some may need help arranging child-care.**
- 2. The format of meetings should be (1) study time, then (2) sharing of personal needs for prayer, then (3) prayer.**

If the group's primary purpose is study, the study time may be long and the other parts short; but the three parts should still be included. If the purpose of the group is spiritual accountability, the study time may be short, but they should have some material that they are studying.

If a group has personal sharing and discussion but no lesson material to study, it will tend to become chaotic. It will be dominated by some members' personalities. Lesson material makes them all respond to truth beyond what is in their own minds.

- 3. Start and end the meetings on time.**

If you start and end late, those who value their own time will start coming later or skip some of the meetings.

- 4. Set the date when the group will end.**

Members need to know how long their commitment is for. Normally, new members should not be allowed join the group after several meetings, unless the group is rotating lessons for new converts. If the group is studying a lesson series, the number of lessons may set the number of weeks they will meet. If they are meeting for spiritual accountability, they could set a period of six months. At the end, they can organize again. At that time some members may leave, and the group can consider whether or not to allow new members to join.

- 5. When studying, emphasize a life-changing purpose rather than knowledge for its own sake.**

A member will feel that the group is worthwhile if he is able to draw personal, specific applications from the study.

- 6. Follow up on commitments.**

If someone has shared a problem then agreed that he should take a certain course of action, ask at the next meeting if he has done what he said he would do.

7. The leader should be available to meet with a member individually to give spiritual guidance.

Other members may also get together at other times for encouragement.

8. Select a good meeting place.

It should be an informal meeting place with a home atmosphere. Seating should be as circular as possible, so that each member can see every other member's face. This will encourage participation. Meet in a place where there will not be interruptions or distractions.

9. Practice good listening habits.

Signs of good listening are eye contact, a concentrated expression, ignoring distractions, and responsiveness to the speaker's humor or other emotions.

10. Make sure no member is always silent.

Direct a question to a member who does not speak much ("What do you think about this, Charles?").

11. Do not pressure a member to share something personal.

Instead, try to create an atmosphere where he will feel free to speak. Build a member's confidence by giving him eye contact and commending something he says.

12. Try to ask questions that they can answer to build their confidence.

If someone gives a wrong answer, try to affirm something good about the answer before critiquing it.

13. Try to affirm every comment in some way before criticizing it.

14. If someone has a tendency to talk too much and answer all the questions, find a way to limit him.

One way is to direct questions to specific members. Or you can ask, "What do the rest of you think?" In a discussion, you could say, "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken about this yet."

If a member still talks too much, the leader could talk to him outside of the meeting. He could say something like this: "Charles, you are a quick thinker and able to respond quickly in discussions, but I'm concerned that some of the others will not participate if we answer everything quickly. Can you help me get everyone involved?"

15. Don't let two or three members have their own discussion while ignoring the group.

If someone wants to keep arguing for a long time about something, tell him that the discussion will have to be finished later outside of the meeting.

16. Don't allow anyone to interrupt others.

Raise your hand, assertively stop the interrupter, and allow the first speaker to finish. Otherwise, a discussion will always be dominated by the less mannered members. People who are less assertive will feel frustrated that they cannot finish their sentences.

17. Listen to complaints.

Any complaint may show a problem that can be corrected. Don't ignore signs of dissatisfaction. If someone is dissatisfied with the group meeting, he may not understand the purpose, or he may have a valid complaint.

18. If a member persistently acts hostile, disruptive, argumentative, or bored, he may not accept the goals of the group.

The group may not be what he expected. Talk to him privately to help him see the group's purpose.

19. The leader does not have to know the answer to every problem.

His role is not to have the answer to everything but to lead the group to bear burdens in prayer.

20. Be flexible and patient with interruptions of the schedule.

Remember that the events in our lives are part of God's development of us. A problem is an opportunity.

21. If a member often takes the whole meeting to share his needs, offer to counsel him at another time.

Otherwise, the other members will feel that the meeting is being stolen from them. Do not let the group lose its purpose, unless the members agree together that the purpose should be changed.

22. Don't allow the discussions to become subversive.

Don't let the group become a forum for criticizing the local church and other leaders.

23. Remember that the effectiveness of the group depends on the power of God working through it.

The group is only a scriptural structure that God uses.

PART 3

MEETING THE NEEDS OF NEW DISCIPLES

QUICK RESPONSE TO A NEW CONVERT

Discipleship starts at conversion. A new convert has several urgent needs. To continue the relationship with God that he has just begun, he needs to know how to pray and read the Bible. He also needs a new community of friends because he will lose many of his old friends. He needs guidance in many lifestyle issues.

The church must begin discipleship of a new convert immediately. *Immediately* does not mean the following Sunday. It means when he lifts his head from praying to be saved. Someone must take responsibility for daily contact with the convert for at least the first week. He should meet several other Christians in the local church. He should have opportunities to discuss the changes that are happening to him and to ask questions.

The convert should be invited to join a small group where he can ask questions and get encouragement. If possible, he should be introduced to several others in the group during the days before the first meeting that he attends. Several members could give him a phone call ahead of time to make his acquaintance and welcome him to the group. This begins building his feeling of being in a community.

A new convert should join the group at its next meeting. The lessons should be covered in rotation so that a member can be added at any time. This way the new convert gains a support group immediately. Members graduate from the course individually when they finish all the lessons.

PRAYING PAUL'S PRAYERS FOR BELIEVERS

Paul's prayers for new believers tell what needs to happen to a new Christian. These prayers guide us in praying for young Christians because we should pray the same things for them that Paul prayed. These prayers also guide our ministries because we should cooperate with what God is doing for them.

Let's look at Paul's prayers for three different groups.

The Thessalonians

- » Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

The first letter to the Thessalonians gives a call to holiness. Every believer is called to live in victory and purity, and God promises that it is possible by faith. We should pray and teach with the goal of bringing every believer to victory and purity.

The Philippians

- » Read Philippians 1:9-11.

These verses tell about an ongoing process in the believer's life. His love should be continually increasing. As that happens, his ability to discern what is best should increase. As he discerns, he adapts his life to focus on what is best. This must be happening in order for him to be pure (sincere) and without offense.

The people that Paul wrote to in these verses had been Christians for some time already. Yet, Paul was praying that they would keep increasing in their love for God and, by that love, be able to understand God's will for them better.

Here are some questions that a young believer should consider:

- What is an example of a change that I made in my life when God showed me that an attitude, habit, or action was not the best?
- Is there anything in my life that I have doubts about?
- Am I willing to let God show me in prayer any changes I should make?

The Colossians

- » Read Colossians 1:9-12.

He prayed that they would receive knowledge of God's will, in wisdom and spiritual understanding. A new convert does not yet understand all about the will of God for his lifestyle. He will gradually see that certain habits, words, and attitudes in his life should change. Since he loves God, he will more and more conform his life to God's will. The discipler should be praying and carefully teaching the young Christian to recognize God's will.

He said that they would walk worthy of the Lord as a result of better understanding God's will. They would become more appropriate representatives of God. Their lives would better match their profession of being transformed by grace. What the discipler must remember

is that until this process has gone on for a while, some inconsistencies will show in the life of the young Christian.

A walk that is worthy includes being fruitful in every good work. We should not be surprised when a young Christian is not yet fruitful in every good work. He may not yet be as responsible and conscious of duty as he should be.

The verses also tell us that we can have endurance and patience with joy. A person who can keep Christian joy as he serves and endures has gained some spiritual maturity.

Conclusions about Paul's Prayers

The prayers of Paul for young Christians tell us much about the work of discipleship. We should have the right goals for believers' development. We should be able to recognize progress. We should not be surprised to see inconsistencies, misunderstandings, and irresponsibility in a young Christian. We should not expect that all Christian qualities will appear suddenly.

We should notice that Paul was not most concerned about their ministry training or development of ministry skills. He was most concerned about the development of their faith and Christian character. We should not be satisfied with people who can do ministry jobs but lack Christian character.

The teacher is important because of his example and because of the value of information. Learning is emphasized in two of the above prayers. Knowledge is involved in the spiritual process. The teacher has a great impact through his use of truth.

We should pray Paul's prayers for the young Christians that we influence. We should cooperate with the Holy Spirit to help these processes occur in their lives.

The following prayer is based on Paul's prayers for new Christians.

A PRAYER FOR A YOUNG CHRISTIAN

Heavenly Father,

I pray for _____ that you would sanctify him completely. I pray that he would be holy in his actions, attitudes, and motives.

Help his love for you to keep growing, so that he understands better and better what your perfect will for him is. Help him to discern what is best and always to choose it, so that his life will bear fruit for your glory.

Help him to live daily as a Christian should, pleasing you in everything and learning more about your ways. Help him to draw strength from you, so that he can live in victory and endure trials with joy. May he always be thankful for the grace you give.

Amen

PART 4

INTRODUCTION TO LESSON SERIES

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON SERIES

The lessons are designed to be used in a group of new converts or believers who are interested in spiritual growth. The lessons are easy to teach, with discussion questions provided. There should be much discussion during the lesson, then personal sharing at the end.

In preparation for each meeting, the leader should read over the lesson, making sure he understands the concepts and their importance. He should be prepared to start the sharing time by sharing from his own experience. He should consider how he would answer the sharing questions at the end of each lesson. The depth at which he shares will tend to set the depth at which others share.

THE LESSON DESIGN

The Leader Text shows the full lessons, including teaching material, discussion points, and scripture passages. The Student Text only includes the most important points from each lesson.

Notes to class leaders are included throughout the course with directions for specific parts of the lessons. *They are italicized.*

In the leader's materials, the » symbol indicates a discussion question or scripture to read. In the case of discussion questions, the leader should wait for responses after asking the questions, rather than giving answers immediately. Often the responses will help prepare for the material to follow.

Each participant should use his Bible during the lessons. Most scripture verses for the lessons are printed in the leader's material, but not on the student pages. The leader should ask someone to look up the verse and read it aloud. Occasionally, he can save time by reading it himself from his notes, especially when many verses are used, but he should not do it himself often. Having students look up verses gives them another way to participate, gives them practice and familiarity with their Bibles, and gets them accustomed to seeing verses in context. It continually reinforces the sense that the Bible is our final authority.

The section labeled “For Group Sharing” provides questions to start discussion at the end of the lesson. For many topics, the discussion may start easily, and the questions may not be needed. Not all of the questions have to be used.

The prayer at the end of each lesson helps the members pray for fulfillment of the truth in their lives. Someone should read the prayer at the end, and the members should be encouraged to go back to it during the week and truly make it a prayer from their hearts.

Each lesson ends with a study assignment. The group could occasionally make time to discuss the results of their individual study.

Many of the lessons call for the members to make specific commitments to apply the truth learned. The leader should take note of the commitments made and ask members later if they have followed through.