Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 7: Wednesday, October 6, 2021

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Spiritual Discipline: Discipleship**

**Greeting:**

Good evening church! For those of you visiting tonight, or for those of you that may not know me, my name is Justin Ader, and I am the Youth Director here at Disciples Church. I am very thankful to be up here tonight to walk us through another spiritual discipline. But, before we dive into tonight’s teaching, I’d like to take a moment and pray a Puritan prayer that is found in The Valley of Vision, which is a cool book of rich Puritan prayers and devotions. The title of this specific prayer that I am going to pray is called, “A Disciple’s Renewal.” I thought it was fitting for tonight’s lesson and that we would all be blessed by the words found in it. As I pray it, listen to the words and be blessed by it. Pray with me.

**Prayer:**

O My Saviour, help me. I am so slow to learn, so prone to forget, so weak to climb; I am in the foothills when I should be on the heights; I am pained by my graceless heart, my prayerless days, my poverty of love, my sloth in the heavenly race, my sullied conscience, my wasted hours, my unspent opportunities. I am blind while light shines around me: take the scales from my eyes, grind to dust the evil heart of unbelief. Make it my chiefest joy to study thee, meditate on thee, gaze on thee, sit like Mary at thy feet, lean like John on thy breast, appeal like Peter to thy love, count like Paul all things dung. Give me increase and progress in grace so that there may be more decision in my character, more vigour in my purposes, more elevation in my life, more fervour in my devotion, more constancy in my zeal. As I have a position in the world, keep me from making the world my position; may I never seek in the creature what can be found only in the Creator; let not faith cease from seeking thee until it vanishes into sight. Ride forth in me, thou King of kings and Lord of lords, that I may live victoriously, and in victory attain my end. Amen.

**Introduction:**

Tonight we will be focusing on the spiritual discipline of discipleship. We will start by learning some definitions pertaining to discipleship, then we will look at why we do discipleship, and finally, we will get into the application of practicing the spiritual discipline of discipleship.

Before we dive in, I want to remind us all of a couple of truths that need to be at the forefront of our minds as we prepare ourselves for the spiritual discipline of discipleship. I want to look at our mission statement here at Disciples Church, and also look at two questions in our Word of Truth Catechism. For those of us who came in here tonight with distractions from the cares of this world; like our occupations, finances or whatever else, these truths will help us to reorient our thinking back to being focused on Christ as Christians, and how we should be living as Christians. It is so vitally important that we as Christians, be constantly reoriented back to Christ throughout our days. So with that let’s start with our mission statement here at Disciples Church.

*Our mission as a church is, “To glorify God through lives transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”*

Our mission statement starts with the words, *“to glorify God…”* Why is that? It is because God has made us to glorify Him in all that we do. We were made to worship God. Question 15 in our Word of Truth Catechism asks the question...

Q15. Why did God make us? God made us to glorify Him, so His glory would be known and praised.

Isaiah 43:7 Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

The Apostle Paul writing to the believers in Corinth says in…

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB) Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

So if God made us to glorify Him, how then do we do that? Listen to Question 16 in our Word of Truth Catechism…

Q16. How should we glorify God? We glorify God by trusting in Jesus, enjoying Him, treasuring Him, growing in our knowledge of Him, believing His words, obeying His commands, and by showing and telling the world how great He is.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

We now know why God has made us, which is to glorify Him, and how we are to glorify Him. The second part of our mission statement here at Disciples Church says, *“through lives transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”* Our mission is to glorify God through lives transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here at Disciples Church we believe that the only way for our lives to be transformed is by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel isn’t a program, but rather, it’s the good news about a person, Jesus – that through His life, death, and resurrection, we can be reconciled to God. In other words, we are not accepted by God based on what we do, but instead we’re accepted by God based on what Jesus did for us. Only the truth of this message has the power to radically transform our lives for God’s glory. As the gospel is understood more deeply, we see the beauty of God more clearly, and our heart’s affections are then drawn to Him more completely. So as a church, Disciples Church is “gospel centered” in that everything we do as a church is driven by the gospel and is designed to help us deepen in our understanding and faith in the gospel.

Practicing all of the spiritual disciplines that we have been taught these past 2 months, and the ones we will be taught in the next 2 months I believe all revolve around what Q16 in our Word of Truth Catechism is asking and answering. Listen one more time as I read it.

Q16. How should we glorify God? We glorify God by trusting in Jesus, enjoying Him, treasuring Him, growing in our knowledge of Him, believing His words, obeying His commands, and by showing and telling the world how great He is.

How do we do these things? How do we trust, enjoy, treasure, grow, believe, and obey Jesus? One very important vehicle for this is the spiritual discipline of discipleship. Discipleship is a must for all Christians. True, biblical discipleship is so very critical for how we live out our faith as Christians, and mature in Christ. I want to start tonight by looking at some definitions as we dive into discipleship, starting with what is a spiritual discipline?

1. **Definitions**
   1. **What is a spiritual discipline?**

Donald S. Whitney, a Professor of Biblical Spirituality, I think did a great job of defining spiritual disciplines when he said, “spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God’s people since biblical times.”

The purpose of practicing spiritual disciplines is godliness. It is to grow and mature in Christ.

1 Timothy 4:7 (NASB) … discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

Now that we know what a spiritual discipline is, and we know that tonight we will be looking at discipleship as a spiritual discipline, let's look at the question of what is a disciple?

* 1. **What is a disciple?**

One of the main verses in Scripture where we see the word “disciple,” is in the Great Commission. If you have your bibles, open them up to Matthew 28:18-20. This very passage is where we get our command from Jesus to make disciples. Follow along with me as I read.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

So what is a disciple? The standard definition of a disciple is someone who adheres to the teachings of another. It is a follower or a learner. It refers to someone who takes up the ways of someone else. So, to be a disciple of Jesus simply means to be a follower, an imitator, of Jesus. A disciple of Christ is one who is growing in Christlikeness. But it gets deeper than that. The Greek word for disciple has a deeper meaning than what our English definition says a disciple is. The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes.* It is a person who engages in learning through instruction from another. With this, see that Christ’s commission for Christians in discipleship, includes the necessary activity of following someone in Christ, as they follow Christ. Learning through instruction from another. More on this later.

A clarity that I need to make before moving forward though is that before anyone can be a disciple of Jesus, they must first be born again and given the gift of saving faith in Jesus. A person whose heart has not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who has not repented of their sin, and entrusted their life to Jesus Christ cannot be a disciple of His. Unrepentant sinners do not belong to Jesus, and therefore, cannot be a disciple of His until they have been given the gift of saving faith by God’s grace alone. To be a disciple of Jesus does not mean to follow Him partially, it means to follow Him wholly. We are to give our entire lives to Christ; submit to Him, worship Him, and obey Him as His disciples–His redeemed followers.

Luke 14:25-33 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Luke 9:23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

As true disciples of Jesus, we are commanded to make disciples‒to reproduce this process. Remember, Jesus commands us to do this in Matthew 28, which we just read. Because Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, we are to obey our Master and live for Him and His glory.

So how do we grow as disciples? And how do we as disciples then make disciples? Well, one of the tools that God has given us to grow and to make disciples is through the spiritual discipline of discipleship. Let’s climb into that definition now. What is discipleship?

* 1. **What is discipleship?**

Word of Truth Catechism:

Discipleship is the process of following and learning from more mature Christians and doing the work of disciple-making ourselves: calling people to saving faith, then training them in sound doctrine and how to live as imitators of Christ.

Because of Christ command and Scripture otherwise, we know that all Christians are called to practice the spiritual discipline of discipleship. To neglect discipleship, is to disobey God. Now, there are many different layers of discipleship, and it is important to note that not all layers are for everyone. In a little while, we will get into all the different layers and applications for the spiritual discipline of discipleship, and I am excited for that as I hope that it will be a blessing to you! But I think it is important to also state what discipleship is not. Too many in the church today try to call discipleship something that it’s not. Discipleship is not your monthly women’s breakfast at Denny’s where you hang out over some food and talk about what you have planned for the day or week. I’ve seen this, and similar things called discipleship. These types of things are good and needed, but they aren’t discipleship. They are what we call fellowship.

Fellowship is spending quality time with Christians in unity in Christ, and that time often includes inviting exhortation from, and being accountable to one another. If we look back to the end of our definition of discipleship, it says **training them in sound doctrine and how to live as imitators of Christ.** Gathering at a men’s or women’s breakfast with a mini bible study does not truly encompass what Jesus meant when He said “make disciples…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” or what is meant by our definition, “**training them in sound doctrine and how to live as imitators of Christ.”** In order to train someone in sound doctrine and how to live as a follower of Christ, there needs to be a deeper level of engagement and intentionality. Discipleship cannot be surface level if we are called to obey all that Jesus has commanded. And we, as Christians, should have a desire to dive deep and become imitators of Christ, growing in our knowledge of Him.

1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

So now that we know the definition of discipleship, I want to cover the question of why discipleship?

1. **Why Discipleship?**
   1. **Commanded by God in Scripture**

One of the most important reasons for why all Christians–true believers–need to practice the spiritual discipline of discipleship is because we are commanded by God in Scripture to do so. Remember, Jesus commanded in

Matthew 28, “*make disciples.”*

And, see that according to Christ, true love for God is necessarily connected to true obedience to what He has commanded of us in Scripture.

John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

* 1. **Spiritual Growth (Sanctification)**

Another very important reason for the spiritual discipline of discipleship of all true believers is for spiritual growth, what we call progressive sanctification.

Word of Truth Catechism:

Progressive sanctification is growing in holiness through obedience to the Lordship of Jesus and His word from a right heart. By grace, it is a lifelong process powered by the Holy Spirit to change believers to become more like Christ.

Did you hear that? Spiritual growth occurs when we obey Jesus as Lord, and obey His word. The Holy Spirit does the work to change us as we are discipled, and as we make disciples. It’s important to understand that while the Holy Spirit is the one who causes spiritual growth, He uses the means of various things to mature us as Christians, one of those being discipleship.

2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Colossians 1:10 So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Scripture is clear, one of the ways we grow as Christians is by being taught the commands of God by more mature believers in order to grow and become more mature believers ourselves. Discipleship is about conforming to Jesus Christ. We do this by learning from and following more mature Christians as they seek to follow Christ more and more. This is how God has designed for us to grow. It is a multiplication process. Mature Christians discipling less mature Christians, and then those Christians as they mature start discipling less mature Christians, and the process just keeps replicating. With this process, you can see that all believers are disciples, and are called to make disciples. But what you must also understand is that a person can only disciple another person to the degree that they themselves have been discipled. If I have only been attending Sunday worship, and nothing else, I won’t be able to disciple someone that is ready to be equipped for eldership. Again, God’s design is for less mature Christians to be discipled by more mature Christians. I want to finish off this section by looking at the dangers of neglecting discipleship.

* 1. **The Dangers of Neglecting Discipleship**

It has been my experience that there are many dangers that can come upon us when we neglect the spiritual discipline of discipleship. Let me share some of my story with you all.

One of the main reasons as to why I am standing here before you tonight as a Covenant Member of Disciples Church is in fact due to this topic of discipleship. I was given the gift of saving faith when I attended another local church here in town in the Spring of 2014. After a month or two, I met with one of the pastors so that he could hear my story and learn more about me. He then invited me to do a short book study with him. We met for about 8 weeks, went through the book, and then I was told that I was ready to disciple someone. I had thought that this 8 week study was my training as a disciple, and that I was ready to teach others. Later on, I was invited to participate in some seminary classes with other men and our new Senior Pastor, but that was short-lived. I was put into leadership positions within the church and thought that I was ready. Truth is, I didn’t have a solid foundation, and I didn’t know sound doctrine. I was an immature, new Christian who was pouring into others without deep training in sound doctrine, without deep training in the various areas of life to be able to give good counsel, and I had little to no accountability. By 2017, I was deprived of solid resources to lean on, living how I thought I should live, and knew that something huge was missing in my faith journey. God the Holy Spirit had been convicting me of something that wasn’t correct. Soon after, my conviction was revealed to me. Matt Kirstine and I were acquaintances, and I saw on Facebook when he posted the groundbreaking on the news of the new church campus. The name Disciples Church is what stuck out to me. “Disciples.” I remember immediately messaging him and asking him about it. In May of 2017, I had a 3 hour lunch with Matt and he gave me a good summary of Reformed Theology and biblical discipleship. I had an overwhelming joy come over me with what Matt was telling me. I knew this was what I was missing. It took 7 months of many meetings with leaders from both churches to finally make the transition to Disciples Church. Krista and I were in desperate need of biblical discipleship which our previous church did not offer. Shortly after starting at Disciples Church, Pastor Joshua and his wife Jennifer took us out to dinner. He asked me if I had any questions for him, and the first words out of my mouth were, “when do we start discipleship?”

Krista and I had a fire in us to jump right in. We were committed and ready. After showing that we were committed to Sunday Worship and Midweek Gathering, we became Covenant Members. Shortly after this, in April 2018, we started Further Growth Discipleship. After some time, we transitioned into Leadership Discipleship. Here we are 3 ½ years later. There has been great fruit for Krista and myself that has come from practicing the spiritual discipline of discipleship. Our faith and devotion to God has grown. We have both grown in sound doctrine. We have matured as followers of Christ in our words and actions. We have grown in our roles as husband and wife. We have grown as parents to our five children. We have grown as servants in the local church. This has meant a lot for our marriage, as well as our family life. Our desire is to live a life that is pleasing to God. There has been good fruit produced in us, and many others because of obedience to Jesus’ command to be discipled and make disciples. I praise God for all He has done, is doing now, and will do in and through this local church.

When we aren’t doing what God has called us to do, there should be a conviction of these things. I am thankful that for me, this conviction led to God-honoring obedience to the spiritual discipline of discipleship, and joining a church that practices these things faithfully. It is dangerous to neglect discipleship because without authentic Christian accountability and training in sound doctrine, we will be tossed to and fro by the waves of every wind of doctrine as Scripture says, and we will do life the way we think it should be done, but not the way God has prescribed in His Word. There were many times that I fell into and lived in questionable decisions and sin, even as a Christian, due to my negligence of not being discipled by a more mature believer. It is not a good place to be. That is why this spiritual discipline is so needed in the church today—as it has been from the beginning. It is my conviction and concern that far too many professing Christians aren’t taking seriously the call of our Lord to be discipled by more mature believers. My hope tonight is that many who are missing out on the many blessings of discipleship would see God’s commission on them and His good design to grow our lives and the lives of others in maturity and Christlikeness. While far too many modern churches have moved away from a devoted practice of biblical discipleship, I am so very thankful that Disciples Church is not one of them. The question is, are you taking advantage of the opportunity to be discipled so that you can be a part of Christ commission in greater and greater ways.

1. **Application For The Spiritual Discipline of Discipleship**

As Christians, it should be our deepest desire to know Christ, to grow in Christ, and to be on mission for Christ. This is why discipleship is so important. Discipleship is a willingness to prioritize one’s life to being taught and mentored and trained up to be more like Christ. Do you see the connection with what our desire should be and how we accomplish this? This is why the spiritual discipline of discipleship must be a greater priority in our life.

For the rest of our time this evening, I want to focus on how to apply the spiritual discipline of discipleship to our own lives so that we better understand how we are to live this out as Christians. It is pointless to learn any spiritual discipline if we don’t apply them to our own journeys of faith in Christ. Learning without action is worthless. So let’s lean in and learn how to put this spiritual discipline of discipleship into action.

I want to start by looking at our four layers of discipleship here at Disciples Church, and then look at discipleship within the family. An important clarity that I want to first make is that although we are commanded in holy Scripture to do discipleship, the specifics with how we do it and what it looks like are different for every person. For example, a man aspiring to be a biblical elder will not be discipled in the same way as a man in the church who simply aspires to serve God and grow in godliness. They will have core, critical points of similarity, but will also have practical differences in how and when it’s done. So with that, let’s look at how we practice discipleship at Disciples Church.

* 1. **At Disciples Church**

Here at Disciples Church, we have four different layers or ways in which we follow the command in Scripture to practice the spiritual discipline of discipleship. Let’s start with the first layer which is a critical foundation for all Christians, Sunday worship.

* + 1. **Sunday Worship**

Sunday worship is a significant catalyst in discipleship. Sunday worship is the most primary way that we gather as the body of Christ to be equipped by our shepherds in the teaching of God’s word, in fellowship, in celebrating the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. These things are all critical for the growth of a Christian. Let’s see this in Scripture.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Ephesians 4:11-14 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

The historic 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith says in chapter 26 section 5:

In the execution of this power wherewith he is so intrusted, the Lord Jesus calls out of the world unto himself, through the ministry of his word, by his Spirit, those that are given unto him by his Father, that they may walk before him in all the ways of obedience, which he prescribes to them in his word. Those thus called, he commands to walk together in particular societies, or churches, for their mutual edification, and the due performance of that public worship, which he requires of them in the world.

We all must have a biblical view of and commitment to the corporate gathering of the local church. In order to make this commitment and keep it you may need to make some adjustments in your life such as plans with family on Sundays, weekend activities or travel, work on Sundays, and so on. I have had to make this change myself. My work schedule had me working on Sundays for too many years, and while I was thankful that I was able to leave during work to come to church to participate in corporate worship and to serve; this cost me time away from my wife and kids and the role I play in their lives on Sunday’s. I was off the clock while here at church and this meant I had to work later into the evening instead of getting off work at my normal time. By God’s grace, I now have a new position at work that has me off on Sundays. This allows me to follow God’s command to better practice sabbath by gathering corporately, serving, and fellowshipping in the evening with other families.

In regard to discipleship, it is important for us to see that to some degree, every committed person who attends Sunday worship faithfully is being discipled. They are being taught the word of God, given exhortation through the preaching of the word, learning how to apply God’s truths and commands to their lives, they are being reoriented to Christ to become more like Christ, to fight sin, and to worship God with all their lives.

It is important to view corporate worship as a blessing from God. It is a blessing that we can gather freely here on a Sunday morning and worship.

Matthew Henry said, “Sunday is a privilege and a benefit, not a task and a drudgery.”

We should come on Sunday with hearts prepared for the growth that God will cause in us as we are discipled under the preaching of His word. And for clarity, learning God’s word one day a week isn’t enough either. We should be diligent in the other six days of the week to study the Bible and pray. This is part of being a disciple of Christ. This is something that our Bible reading plan here at Disciples Church helps with also. Only doing one of these things or none is detrimental to the life of a Christian.

Pastor John MacArthur said, “The source of most of the problems people have in their Christian lives relates to two things: either they are not worshiping six days a week with their life, or they are not worshiping one day a week with the assembly of the saints. We need both.”

Sunday Worship is the foundational layer for the spiritual discipline of discipleship, and is for *every* Christian. None of us should have an excuse to not gather as a church for corporate worship in any kind of regular way. We are all commanded to participate in this particular, regular gathering. So if you are faithfully committed to Sunday Worship, then you are practicing the spiritual discipline of discipleship, however, Sunday Worship is insufficient if you want to more fully become a faithful and mature disciple of Jesus Christ. Doing life together in additional forms is what is modeled for us in Scripture, and is what God calls us to as followers of Christ. The next three layers here at Disciples Church is where we see this happening.

* + 1. **Midweek Gathering**

The second layer of discipleship that we do here is Midweek Gathering, which you are all participating in now. I am thankful you are here and to see our Midweek gathering growing with brothers and sisters in Christ who hunger to mature in their faith and Christlikeness. Midweek currently happens on Wednesday evenings, which is why it is called Midweek. The focus of Midweek is to abide in Christ and His word corporately (together) through sound teaching and organized community.

Midweek is structured in such a cool way. The first 15 minutes are a time of fellowshipping with others as you prepare for the lesson. Then we get 45 minutes to an hour of sound teaching together as a large group. After that, we get about 45 minutes to an hour of group time discussion led by an intentional, appointed leader. Another cool aspect to Midweek is that even after our time is up, many of you stay in the quad area for an extended amount of time to fellowship and pray with one another.

Within our Midweek Gathering there are Midweek groups. These groups are a next step for people to be known, loved, challenged, and led. The design is for group members to be growing in knowledge and community, to be known by the leader and others.

What is key in this layer of discipleship is that what is being taught must be biblically sound, and that our group leaders are biblically sound as well. This is why the elders are careful about who is on the teaching team, what is being taught, and the appointing of group leaders. It is vitally important that all who teach and lead here at Disciples Church are unified in sound doctrine. It is important that you see your Midweek table group leaders not as mere facilitators or discussion leaders, but as more mature brothers and sisters in Christ who are there to lead you and point you to Christ. Therefore, you should be seeking to learn from them and submit to them as Scripture says to. Showing respect and following them is a large part of how you are being discipled at this layer of discipleship.

Midweek is the second layer of discipleship, but the first layer of what we call community discipleship. Midweek is a crucial layer of discipleship for disciples of Jesus, and is for *every* Christian. We should be prioritizing our schedules to make sure that we are here on Wednesdays to be taught and led as we mature in Christ together. The modern day temptation is to prioritize kids' sports, overtime hours at work or other commitments that get in the way of a true priority to grow in the Lord together. I pray that each person and family takes serious inventory for how to prioritize spiritual growth in ourselves and our families over the other more temporary things calling for our affection or attention.

Now, while Midweek is a great way to practice next layers of discipleship, there are still deeper layers to submitting yourself to the spiritual mentorship and training of others. Jesus’ closest disciples didn’t just gather with him two times a week, no, they followed Him day by day. They went so far to make changes to their careers and family commitments and practices so that they could be trained by Jesus and learn to be imitators of Him. In this discipleship journey they were regularly corrected, they were challenged, and they were stretched to practices that they would not normally do themselves. But isn’t that the point, if we knew the way ourselves we wouldn’t need to be discipled. But God’s good design is that we humbly and joyfully commit ourselves to being trained up by more mature believers who can take us to places we just wouldn't go to on our own. This is closer *life on life* discipleship. This leads us to our next layer of discipleship.

* + 1. **Further Growth Discipleship**

The third layer of discipleship that we practice here is what we call Further Growth Discipleship. This layer moves into an increased focus, and increased personal interaction and application. Where do we see the need for this additional layer of discipleship of life on life application in Scripture?

2 Timothy 2:1-2 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 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.

Titus 2:3-5 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.

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

To teach and train Christian men and women the way Scripture says to requires this life on life type of discipleship. Simply attending Midweek isn’t enough if you are wanting this fuller biblical discipleship.

Further Growth Discipleship is for those of you who are interested and able to go deeper and to get to facets of your life that you just don’t get into in larger circles of group time. Further Growth Discipleship requires a commitment to additional time in the week to meet, to study, and grow with an intentional and qualified disciple maker. While fellowship is increased in this layer, this additional time is not intended to be focused on a social gathering, rather, its purpose is for growth in biblical knowledge, sanctification/maturity, life mentoring and accountability.

Further Growth Discipleship is set for a particular season or length. Sometimes it is just a season of weeks or months as you work through a particular book or area of life and sometimes it's longer. When you are done with a season of Further Growth Discipleship it doesn’t necessarily mean that you are finished being discipled at this level. There could be another point in your life where you need to be discipled in a different area of struggle or life. For example, you may have been in this layer as a young adult who didn’t have children. Now you have a husband or wife, and children, but you long to know how to be a more godly spouse or parent according to Scripture. This would be a good time to get back into Further Growth Discipleship.

This layer may be a study through a book, several months to cover a few books and topics, or may even be a few years. But for clarity, if a Further Growth Discipleship season ends, discipleship doesn’t end. You are still a part of a Midweek group looking for ways to grow, be known and accountable, and that doesn’t end. We are never done being discipled while here on earth.

Further Growth Discipleship happens in many different ways. The goal is not for this layer to all look exactly the same, but rather, for this layer to be intentional in that a leader is looking to help those under their leadership and care to grow in specific ways. There is a real variety in how this happens throughout the church. For example, I may need further growth in how I love and lead my wife. But, another guy may need further growth in being wise in his financial decision making. This is the purpose for this layer, to further grow disciples of Christ for His glory, and their good, and the good of others in the specific areas they need to mature in. Why the good of others? How we further grow impacts others as they look to us as more mature Christians. You see, Further Growth Discipleship aims to produce growth in a person so much so that they would be readied themselves to pour into others in disciple-making to the degree they have been discipled. This is a critical way in which we mature in Christ, practice the “one anothers,” and obey Christ. In many churches, usually this layer is limited to only the elders being equipped to lead this kind of discipleship. But that is not what Jesus told His disciples in the great commission, and that is not what the apostle Paul tells us in his epistles. Members of each local church should be trained up over time and vetted to lead discipleship like this. That is what is happening here at Disciples Church. Praise God for that! Lastly, we have our fullest layer of discipleship.

* + 1. **Leadership Discipleship**

We call this layer Leadership Discipleship. This layer seeks to prepare individuals for certain roles of leadership in God’s church―roles such as: group leading, formal teaching, leadership disciple-making, church planting, missionary work, the office of elder or deacon, and so on.

In Leadership Discipleship, the goal is to emulate the New Testament model of discipleship as much as possible. We see this in Scripture with Jesus and the twelve disciples, and with the apostle Paul in his relationship with Timothy.

The Leadership Discipleship process includes committing to the highest level of authenticity, dedication, study, and accountability. This is for individuals who have real availability, commitment, and show important prerequisite qualities. This layer is not for everyone, and is not required of anyone. We all have different gifts that God has blessed us with to serve the body of Christ, and not everyone is called to be in leadership. For those whom God is making ready to serve and lead at this level, it is so wonderful to be able to be discipled and made ready to honor God in these things. This process is most often a many year commitment and journey. I am thankful to see God at work in many in our church at this level and to be growing in the Lord myself. May God raise up many readied and mature leaders, to serve him and make disciples of many generations to come.

For the sake of time, I don’t want to dig too far into the details about Leadership Discipleship since this isn’t for everyone like the other three previous layers are, but I want to turn our focus to another very important part regarding the spiritual discipline of discipleship. This has to do with discipleship within the family, particularly for those of us who have children. So let’s take a brief look at this before we dismiss to group time.

* 1. **In The Family**

God has prescribed in His holy Word on how we as Christians are to raise our children.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The spiritual discipline of discipleship for a child from his/her parents is the biblical manner in which this is to be done and accomplished. It is not the sole duty of the local church to do this. In other words, Sunday School, although good, is not the way that God has designed for children to be discipled. Parents have been given the unique responsibility from God to do this with their children from birth until adulthood. Let me remind us of our definition of discipleship:

Discipleship is the process of following and learning from more mature Christians and doing the work of disciple-making ourselves: calling people to saving faith, then training them in sound doctrine and how to live as imitators of Christ.

This is what we are called to do with our children, call them to repentance, and train them in sound doctrine. So how do we do this?

* + 1. **Family Worship (Bible Reading, Prayer & Singing)**

One of the ways in which we do this is through family worship. I have been personally blessed by Donald S. Whitney’s book called, “Family Worship” that I would recommend every parent to read. Family Worship is one of the simplest ways in which we can disciple our children. It involves setting aside a time each day to read the Bible, sing, and pray together as a family. Just like everything else, this needs to be a discipline, otherwise you will never do it. But it is quite simple; read, sing, and pray as a family. If you aren’t sure how to go about doing this, I’d love to help you get started, and I am sure that our Children’s Content Coordinator, Kristen Howard, would help with resources as well.

* + 1. **Discipleship of Children (Catechizing)**

Another way to disciple your children is through what is called catechizing using a catechism. To catechize means to instruct someone in biblical truths by means of question and answer, using a catechism. Here at Disciples Church we have been blessed with the Word of Truth Catechism that was written by our own Pastor Matt. Historically, the use of a solid catechism is primary in how Christian parents have discipled their children. Children memorizing questions and answers, and Scripture to back up those answers. Parents discussing the truths learned with their children. This is a great way for children to learn sound doctrine, spot theological error, and be raised in the instruction of the Lord. Once again, if you have any questions about this, please reach out to myself, the elders, or our children’s ministry team so that we can help guide you in this important God-given role.

If the Lord has entrusted to us His precious little ones to raise and to love, then we are called to raise them in the truths of the Lord and for those he is saving, to disciple them in the Lord and unto greater maturity and Christlikeness as they are readied for adulthood and beyond.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude tonight, let us be reminded that all true believers are disciples of Jesus, and are also called to make disciples themselves. But we need to remember that a person can only disciple another person to the degree that they themselves have been discipled. I showed you tonight that we offer many layers here at Disciples Church that give you the opportunity to obey God’s command to practice the spiritual discipline of discipleship. These are Sunday Worship, Midweek Gathering, Further Growth Discipleship, and Leadership Discipleship. Which layer is best for each person depends on many factors, a key one being their readiness and ability to commit. But let me remind you, all true believers should be doing the first two layers at a minimum in order to know sound doctrine, mature in their faith and honor God’s command in Scripture to know all that He has commanded of His people.

I also briefly showed you ways in which we honor God by practicing this discipline in our homes as we disciple our children. These were family worship and catechizing. We are instructed by God to be doing this with our children, so let’s do it church! Let’s make it a priority in our days to love our children well by being disciplined in discipling them.

I have seen the fruit of discipleship in my own life, my wife’s life, and my children’s life. Who we are now is drastically different from who we were just 3 years ago, and a lot of that has to do with practicing this spiritual discipline of discipleship. Without being faithful to practice this and having a desire to grow in Christ, I believe that we would still be in the same place as we were 3 years ago. Based on our own journey in discipleship I can tell you that our marriage has grown in how we fulfil our God-given roles of husband and wife, our parenting has improved greatly as we raise our kids in the instruction and discipline of the Lord, and our desire to glorify God in all things has greatly increased.

As you prepare to go to group tonight, let me ask you… How are you doing in practicing the spiritual discipline of discipleship? How have you been making excuses as to why you can’t commit to the different discipleship layers? Maybe you are stuck and in need of help in this area. If this is you, lean on your group leaders tonight as it is their desire to help you grow in this area.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let’s strive to honor our Lord together to be in discipleship to be trained as a disciple of Jesus, to mature in our faith, and to teach others to do the same. If you have any questions about this spiritual discipline of discipleship, need clarity, or are interested in the deeper layers of discipleship please do not hesitate to reach out to the elders or anyone in leadership. It is our joy to grow with you as we all strive to mature more and more as disciples of Jesus.

Let’s Pray.