

Ten **BASIC PRACTICES** for participating in a discipleship culture in the local church

“The local church – this Father designed, Jesus-authorized, and Spirit-gifted body- is far better equipped to undertake the work of discipling believers than simply you and your one friend. Jesus does not promise that you and your one friend will defeat the gates of hell. He promises that the church will do this (pg. 68-69).” - from Mark Dever, *Discipling*

1. **Be aware.**

The first thing you can do is begin to pray for awareness of the need for evangelism and growth in the lives of individuals that attend the church. Become personally interested in those around you and discover where they are at spiritually.

2. **Make a plan.**

“Discipling is a relationship in which we seek to do spiritual good for someone by initiating, teaching, correcting, modeling, loving, humbling ourselves, counseling, and influencing (pg. 74).” – from Mark Dever, *Discipling*

Gather the tools.

Put it on the calendar. Look for places in your calendar that can overlap. Can you add a person to your exercise routine? Are there some meal times where others can join you? How can you utilize technology if you cannot be in the same physical place?

Initiate communication.

Choose a place to meet.

3. Ask people for contact information.

Many times God may move in the hearts of people to get more involved encouraging others spiritually and they have no immediate ways to take a next step because they are not gathering the info they need to turn the desire into action.

4. Ask church leaders to connect you with needs.

Let church leaders know what type of situations you feel prepared and equipped to help with and respond quickly when they present you with opportunities.

5. Focus on a few.

Out of the crowds of people Jesus selected 12 who would be with Him and receive more focus and attention. Out of the twelve there were 3 that were able to share in some moments that went beyond the experience of the other 12. Jesus came with a strategy for the gospel to reach the nations and when he began, he began with a few.

6. Overcome obstacles.

Pastor Danny Williams from First Baptist Lyons regularly explains that we have to believe for others before they believe for themselves. By this he means that an influencer desires and hopes for growth in an individual's life before they even desire it for themselves.

7. Create an inter-dependent environment.

The best discipleship environments are never one-way. In an inter-dependent environment with a peer-to-peer focus both people involved in the conversation will be open to being challenged and grow as they study the Scriptures, pray for one another, develop honest communication, and spur each other on to acts of faith.

8. Emphasize gospel-based motivations for holiness.

The truth is we are not just helping people become more disciplined or make moral decisions. We want them to experience all the fruits that the gospel of Jesus Christ makes available to them through the union we have with Christ.

The gospel motivates us to:

- Confess sin because the cross has removed shame and we do not have to prove ourselves to be morally good to be accepted by God.
- Confess sin to discover ways that temptation has deceived us from delighting in God.
- Forsake sin because we have been created in the image of God for better things. We discover that sin distorts our created gifts.
- Forsake sin because God's instruction leads to more satisfying long-term fruit. We obey by faith in God's promises and wait on Him for satisfaction.
- Love other people even when it is difficult because we know the victorious love of God for us though were unworthy.
- Serve in ways that are sacrificial because we are co-laborers for a better Kingdom and having nothing to truly lose in surrendering to God.
- Forgive others because we know God's mercy to be greater *towards us* than what is required *from us*.
- Persevere in trials because we know God's grace has given us hope of undeserved favor through Christ when we rightly deserved judgment. Trials are the worst we will ever know, but we have been saved from God's wrath toward our sin because of His mercy.

Without the gospel we are motivated to:

- Hide sin to protect our image.
- Hide sin because we do not believe God offers something better.
- Minimize sin because we believe it is not really holding us back from God's purposes for us.
- Minimize sin because we feel the short-term fruit really makes us happy.

- Obey God primarily because we want to feel loved by Him or fear His anger.
- Love people only when they measure up to our expectations.
- Serve as long as it does not require too much and makes us feel good for serving.
- Hold sin over others as a way of motivating them to treat us well rather than forgiving.
- Complain in trials that we deserve better because of our “record of righteousness”.

9. Ask good questions.

You may have noticed that some people are particularly good at engaging other people in conversation and making connections. It is easy to assume that there are just some people that are good at it and others who are not. To whatever degree that may be true, it is important for everyone to learn from those who are particularly strong. One of the basic skills that impactful people possess is the ability to ask good questions.

Questions are a great way to connect with people initially.

Questions are important for getting past surface conversation.

10. Persevere.

Read the section called *Grace-based Sanctification* and come back to it often when you believe those you have committed to serving are not making progress. There is always more to the story and God is working.

APPENDIX: Grace-based Sanctification

Ten truths to understand about Spiritual Growth (Sanctification)

1. Spiritual Growth happens because we have been given the Spirit.

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and **renewal of the Holy Spirit**, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. (Titus 3:4-8 ESV)*

*You, however, **are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.** Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:9-13 ESV)*

2. Spiritual Growth happens because Jesus intercedes for us.

*This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, **he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.** (Hebrews 7:22-25 ESV)*

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2 ESV)

3. Spiritual Growth happens because of purposeful trials given by God.

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for **you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 ESV)*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, **the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.** (1 Peter 5:6-10 ESV)*

4. Spiritual Growth happens because God lovingly corrects us.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

*“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.*

***For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”***

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Hebrews 12:3-7 ESV)

5. Spiritual Growth happens because the light of the knowledge of God has been made visible through Christ.

*But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.** For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16-18 ESV)*

*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” **has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.** (2 Corinthians 4:4-6 ESV)*

6. Spiritual Growth happens because God is committed to completing his redeeming work in us.

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that **he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:3-6 ESV)*

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?** (Romans 8:31-32 ESV)*

7. Spiritual Growth happens because the cross has removed a barrier of shame.

*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For **we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses**, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help** in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16 ESV)*

8. Spiritual Growth happens because God gives us genuine repentance.

*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth**, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26 ESV)*

9. Spiritual Growth happens as we appropriate the gospel to combat the desires and deceptions of the flesh.

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand**, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, **because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** (Romans 5:1-5 ESV)*

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, **make every effort to supplement your faith** with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins (2 Peter 1:3-9 ESV)*

10. Spiritual Growth happens as we obey by faith and wait upon the Lord.

*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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.** (Hebrews 5:11-14 ESV)*

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. **For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.** (Romans 6:17-19 ESV)*