

**Core Seminar**

**Discipling**

**Class 5: Discipling in the Local Church**

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**Introduction**

Over the last four weeks we have thought a great deal about the topic of discipleship. We have asked the question “What is discipling?” and have concluded that it is the deliberately, intentionally relating to another Christian with the aim of doing them good spiritually. We have asked “Why engage in discipling?” and concluded that it is critical for other’s good, for our joy and for God’s glory. We have considered various “barriers and excuses for discipling” and have hopefully dispensed with them based on sound reasoning and the teaching of Scripture. Finally, we have considered the object and goal of our discipling relationships and have concluded that the grand object of this wonderful work is to encourage our friend to grow in holiness, as evidenced by greater obedience to God’s revealed will.

There is one more question we must answer before we turn to the specific and practical matters that will occupy the remainder of this class. Our final broad questions are: “What venue is best for establishing discipling relationships?” and “How do we get started?” We will assert today based on practical reasoning, but most importantly based on the pattern of Scripture, that the primary venue for our discipling relationships should be the local church wherever we find ourselves as members.

Now, I want to state here at the outset that we are NOT saying that it is wrong to be in intentional, spiritually encouraging relationships with persons from outside your local church. That is not what we are saying. And we are not saying that it is bad to enter into those kinds of relationships with a friend at school or at work.

I am saying the best place to have discipling relationships *is in your local church*. That seems like a rather straightforward idea, but let’s clarify what I mean by that. What I am NOT saying is that all discipling much take place in the church building, or that only recognized leaders of the local church should disciple, NOR do I intend to say that it is wrong to invest in people who are not members of your church, like Christian friends at work or school.

What we ARE saying is that it is biblically wise that most of us have the majority of our discipling relationships in the context of a local church. We should have a discipling relationship with someone who is also a member of the same church, where you are sharing in the same teaching and the same Christian community.

**Why Disciple in the Context of the Local Church?**

Let’s start with ten reasons why we should disciple in our local church, and then we’ll introduce a few ideas on how this can be done. This list is not exhaustive and it’s not in any order of importance. Making your church the primary platform for one-on-one discipling relationships makes good sense and is a necessary implication of the overall teaching in Scripture regarding the church.

Why disciple in your local church?

**Reason #1: Because God has called the church to be pure.**

Consider discipling in your local church because God has called the church to be pure. We read in Titus 2:14 that a part of the reason Jesus came into the world was to call and create a pure people for himself known as the church.

Paul writes: **Titus 2:11-14** **11**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **12**training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **13**waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14**who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (ESV)

It is in part through discipling relationships that we help other Christians to grow in knowledge and in personal holiness. This is a great part of what Jesus came into the world to do. When we labor in encouraging relationships especially among those who are in the church, then we enhance the corporate witness of the church as a whole.

This should be our desire for our own local church, that it would be a shining example of God’s holiness and transforming power in the lives of his people.

**Reason #2: Because you do not have every spiritual gift.** (see 1 Cor 12)

We should consider the value of church based discipling as a way to balance our own weaknesses and lack of certain gifts. Being a source of spiritual encouragement for others is normative for the Christian life, but we have areas of weakness and spiritual blindness that may also limit our helpfulness in discipling. When our discipling relationships are rooted in the community of a local church, there are others in the relational mix to help balance out the difference.

Do you hesitate to engage in discipling relationships because you are timid? Are you hesitant to engage in deliberate discipling relationships because you feel you lack the full skill and wisdom for the task? Well I have good news: God knows that you are not sufficient for this great task. In his kindness God has given us the church, and the church is sufficient for the work he intends to give her. When you disciple within a relationship of shared church experience, you are acknowledging that you don’t have all the wisdom and encouragement that your friend needs. But you realize that the church, as a whole, is given every good thing that is needed for the task of evangelism and discipling. God has not promised to give you every gift needed to encourage and build up others. That is a promise he has made to the whole church. *You don’t have everything that your friend needs – so your friend needs a church.*

**Reason #3: Because a church provides better and greater accountability.**

Third, we should realize that in the context of discipling relationships, the church provides better and greater accountability than just our friendship alone. In the church we find a network of relationships with people who each know us in a slightly different way and come to our relationship with a different perspective or set of concerns. This web of significant relationships forms a spiritual “safety net” that will help your friend in hard times more than just your relationship alone.

Realize that the church exists in part for the very purpose of increased accountability. The church is structured not only with the love of Christ but also His corrective authority. Matthew 18 is Jesus directing the church how to act with one who does not repent of his sin.

We should realize in all humility that a group of people in a community can know a person so much better than you can alone. If you meet with a friend from work once a week for coffee and discipling there are some serious limitations to how much you can know that person’s life. It may be pretty easy for them to hide, or for you to just miss, significant areas of struggle in their life. But in the context of a church community there is at least a better chance that the mix of relationships will provide a depth and texture of insight that results in better accountability and protection.

**Reason #4: Because you have a limited amount of time.** (See Eph 5:16 & 1 Cor 7:29)

Fourth, we are all challenged by the fact that life is short and our time is precious. For many of you I expect that you feel great pressure trying to balance the demands of your job, spouses, children, relatives, church ministries, neighborhood evangelism and the desire to have meaningful discipling relationships. Think about some of the ways that the ministry of the church can expand your discipling ministry. For example, we talked about previously using the regular teaching times of the church as the content for your discipling relationships—it can be a great way to maximize your time and still be fruitful in the lives of others in your church. So consider getting together with someone from this church and making the Sunday morning sermon, or the Sunday night talk, or a core seminar class the content of your discipling relationship. You can talk together about application – how the sermon, talk or lesson applies to each of your lives. You are not needing to plan and prepare a Bible study on your own; rather, why not allow the public teaching of this church help to grow and shape a fellow brother or sister in Christ even if you time is severely limited.

**Reason #5: Because God is glorified as the body grows together** (Rom 14:19, 1 Cor 14:3-5, 12)

Fifth, individualistic Christianity is an oxymoron. You were never meant to live the Christian life alone. If you feel that you are growing in maturity as a Christian while you ignore those around you, I would challenge you as to how mature you really are. At what point are you maturing if the body of Christ is not reflecting his character in increasing clarity? God intends for us to glorify him primarily through our life together as a church, so we should strive to grow toward him together.

Whether you like it or not, when you live in the context of community, your life is meant to be tethered to others. My son – I love to watch him grow. Wouldn’t it be odd if only his feet grew, but torso and body stayed the same size? He would quickly look disproportionate. The body of Christ is meant to grow together. As you grow, it spills over into their life, and they grow also. As they grow, it spills over into your life, and you grow. God intends for us to mature together as community, growing together in greater Christ-likeness.

[PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS]

**Reason #6: Because building up the church is what you were gifted to do**

Sixth, we should realize that this sort of church based discipling is near the focus of what the Holy Spirit intended when you were given spiritual gifts. Your gifts are intended to bless God’s kingdom, yes, but especially to bless and build up the local church.

Paul writes about this in **1 Corinthians 12:4-7** where he says:  **4**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. **5**And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. **6**There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. **7**But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (NASB)

Likewise in **1 Corinthians 14:12** Paul tells us: **12**So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. (ESV)

There is lots of debate among evangelicals about how exactly to think about these spiritual gifts. In much of the debate, the purpose of these gifts is often over-looked. Spiritual gifts are not for your personal fulfillment, but for the building of the church.

**Reason #7: Because discipling is a primary way to show love for Christ and for his church.**

Seventh, if you are looking for a way to show love to God’s church, if you are thankful for the way God has used this church to impact your life, then I can think of few better than intentionally setting out to do spiritual good for another member of your local church.

As we considered earlier in this course, John 15:12-15 tells us how Jesus loved us by laying down his life and opening up the Father’s truth to us. We can show our love for those that God has placed in our church by doing much the same thing. You can show love for this local body than by intentionally setting out to do good for other members by encouraging them and pointing them toward deeper or more personal consideration of God’s word.

Likewise, consider **1 John 4:19-21** **19**We love, because He first loved us. **20**If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21**And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (NASB)

We demonstrate our love for God by loving others. John tells us “the one who loves God should love his brother.” The second is a necessary implication of the first. Likewise, John says if you love God, and you hate your brother, you are *a liar*. This strong language conveys that a love for Christ and a love for his people are closely intertwined and not easily separated. You discipling in your local church is a way to demonstrate to others that you really do love God.

**Reason #8: Because church-based discipling seems to be the assumption of the whole New Testament**

Eighth, when we look throughout the New Testament, we see Christians gathering together in the local church for the purpose of mutual edification.

Consider **Hebrews 10:23-25** **23**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; **24**and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **25**not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (NASB)

Note: When the author tells us to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, his very next thought is that we should not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.

Virtually every epistle in the New Testament was written to specific local churches to encourage mutual spiritual growth. 1st and 2nd Corinthians were written to the Christians in Corinth to discourage factions among the members, to encourage sexual purity to exhort them to conduct orderly congregational worship, and to clarify the importance of Christ’s resurrection. Galatians helped the believers in Galatia to fight legalism and life by faith. The pastoral letters were written to Timothy and Titus to help them better teach and encourage believing Christians in the context of local churches in Crete and Ephesus. Each epistle assumes that discipleship and growth takes place in the context of the local church.

**Reason #9: Because church-based discipling displays unity in the midst of diversity** (see Rev 5:9-10)

Ninth, church-based discipling displays unity in the midst of diversity. In his book “The Disciple-making church” the author, Bill Hull, makes the point that it is fairly easy to form a parachurch discipling ministry of similar people with similar interests. In membership interviews, I often tell folks not spend time with folks only like themselves. In the church we see the glory and worth of the gospel displayed when people who are not at all like each other relate loving with one another out of a love that is focused on the Gospel. We strengthen our Christian witness when we show unity in the midst of our diversity.

So consider, how many of your friends are similar to you—around the same age, same interests, same lifestyle, same hobbies, same life-stage? Or have you stepped out to cultivate relationships with folks very different from you? I think only spending time with folks like yourself is a mark of selfishness; and learning to love others not like you is a good indicator of someone growing in Christ-likeness.

**Reason #10: Because the church is most healthy when it has a whole “culture of discipling.”** (see Deut 11:18-21)

Finally, we should step back and take a panoramic look at what discipling looks like in the context of a local church. It can certainly take the form of a program, but that is not what the Scriptures envision. It seems that in a local church body the nature of discipling relationships is more organic, intentional but not necessarily structured, deliberate but not clearly defined. The language of Scripture does not revolve around organization or management theory; it revolves around *love*. God’s love for us, and our love for others.

That’s what the elders of this church want to encourage and you can have joy in being a part of. Not a discipling program but a culture of discipling – a loving network of relationships where it is normal for individual members of CHBC to set out to do one another spiritual good.

1. Where people don’t need to sign up for anything, or be recruited, or get permission before they establish a mutually encouraging discipling relationship.
2. Where members just understand that it’s good for them to meet for lunch or coffee and talk about spiritual things.
3. Where mutual encouragement is seen as a normal and basic ministry in the church.
4. Where accountability and transparency are strategized about and delighted in as good gifts from a loving and wise God.
5. That’s what we want to encourage at CHBC and we hope that God will help you to be a part of that. We want you to instinctively sustain and grow that culture by your own loving initiative to spiritually encourage other members of CHBC.

How do we grow such a culture? By having leaders model it. By not creating structural barriers that inhibit it. By encouraging individuals to take personal responsibility for it. By teaching it from the pulpit and in our core seminars.

**How to Get Started**

Once we have decided where we are going to focus our effort in building discipling relationships, we need to address the very practical question of how to get started. Some of you may have previously been a part of discipling ministries that were highly structured, like a college para-church ministry. You may be on board with this idea of using the church as a platform for discipling, but find the idea of how to get going more difficult. To consider this we could break our remaining discussion into three simple parts – who, when, what.

*Who* will you invest your time in? *When* will the two of you get together? *What* will you do during your time together? We’ll talk more in depth later in the course but let’s hit these 3 items briefly now.

***Who*:**

Who should you invest your time into? There are a number of important considerations you should take into account. Who do you know here at CHBC? Who do you think you might best be able to encourage? What are the greatest needs in the church? All those are good questions to ask.

Much of the point of this entire lesson is to help you see more of the benefit of investing in the lives of other people here in your own local church. One of the best things you can do is to simply work to deliberately establish relationships with people here at CHBC. You can hang out around the bookstall and look for new folks that may not yet have people to talk to on Sunday morning and strike up a conversation. You can get to know the people that are working alongside you in ministry or are in your small group.

One of the advantages of being in a transitional church is constantly having new members who are eager to get to know others. If you are having a hard time getting to know others, then stop trying to “break in” to social clicks. New members arrive eager to get to know others.

You can let staff know that you are interested in meeting up with another person one-on-one for mutual encouragement. They will likely have suggestions and folks you can contact.

At the end of the day there is no cookbook answer to the question of who. You just need to decide you want to start meeting up, to intentionally have spiritually encouraging conversations and just do it.

***When:***

When should you meet up with this person? Well, that may largely be a function of your own unique schedule. Certainly it should be often enough to allow for helpful and meaningful accountability. If you only see someone once every 2-3 months that isn’t going to allow for the kind of regular input into their lives that may best serve their spiritual growth. Most people find it useful to get together at least every two weeks, or at the very least, once a month.

***What:***

For many folks this is one of the hardest questions to get past to start blessing others in a discipling relationship. Like I said a few moments ago, we want to encourage is a culture, not a program. We want to model and encourage a culture of living together with a keen eye toward doing one another good spiritually. So what you do is not as important as the basic fact that it be bible centered and spiritually edifying. Read a book. Discuss a sermon. Pray together through the CHBC directory. There is no required curriculum or book to go through. You have lots of good options, so it’s your responsibility to choose one.

**Conclusion**

What a wonderful blessing the local church is for us. Living together as a church provides an opportunity to be fruitful in others’ lives. Here at Capitol Hill Baptist you are surrounded by hundreds of other people who have committed to seeking your spiritual good and to allowing others to encourage them, too. When we become members we sign a covenant that says we will work for the welfare of other members.

So in summary, we are not arguing that other discipling venues are wrong, but that they are not the picture we see in scripture. The primary way that God seems to have provided for us to be fruitful in discipling is through the network of relationships in the local church.

Out of our love for Christ and his church, this should be your primary focus for discipling. The people whom we have covenanted together with are a wonderful focus for our love and concern in discipling.

Keep in mind that the church exists in part to help you disciple, so value it as such.

I close with **1 Thessalonians 5:9-11** **9**For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10**who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. **11**Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (NASB)