

**NWIBA Pastors Roundtable**  
**Discipleship**  
**February 27, 2017**  
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**Intro:** *Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.* – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**Intro:** There has been a new focus emerging over the last 10 years or so — especially among some younger American pastors and ministry leaders — on the importance of making disciples. Sadly, I believe the American Church has experienced an epic failure of discipleship in recent decades. And even with the myriads of materials supplied by what was once called the Sunday School Board, and now is called LifeWay... I believe Southern Baptist's in general haven't had a good grip on Discipleship... and in fact have been behind until recent years parachurch ministries like the Navigators, Campus Crusade (CRU), InterVarsity and others. Maybe one of the reasons why Southern Baptists have been weak on discipleship is our almost universal emphasis on evangelism at the expense of discipleship... or how we divorced evangelism from discipleship and failed to see the biblically and theologically the two are inseparably linked... or as you've heard me say many times, our evangelism methodology emphasized making decisions instead of making disciples. And the abuses of the church growth movement also did not lend itself toward healthy discipleship because marketing

techniques and numerical driven methodologies outweighed the biblical imperative to make disciples.

Discipleship is one of those subjects that cannot be adequately covered in format like this. To cover all aspects of discipleship would require a semester seminary class...so we're going to be very limited this morning in what we can cover. Hopefully, I can wet your appetite to dig into the subject yourself.

What I want you to take away from this meeting is an understanding of some of the problems with discipleship; the meaning of discipleship; some discipleship implementation principles, and finally looking at some strategies for discipleship.

## **I. Problems with Discipleship**

- **Programmatic Approach to Discipleship** - In many churches, especially more programmatic driven churches, discipleship is viewed as a class you take – a program you have. In some cases our programs can even hamper true discipleship instead of enhance it. Why? Because we look at our discipleship programs as the end instead of the means to an end, i.e., conformity to the image of Jesus.
- **Outsourcing of Discipleship** - The sad truth is, most Christians are not engaged in making disciples. Most believers have outsourced disciple making to paid ministers and church programs. That was never God's intention. In fact growing as a disciple and making other disciples is inextricably linked to being a believer.

- **Divorcing Discipleship from Evangelism** – Too often we have seen evangelism and discipleship as two distinct entities meant to be clearly separated in practice and process. A stated or unstated dichotomy exists between “reaching the lost” and “growing the saint”. However, Scripture does not support this false separation. It is my contention that discipleship refers to the whole process of “disciple making” - from conversion to sanctification, from evangelism to *“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* Evangelism and discipleship are not two distinct steps on a linear progression that begins with “soul winning” and climaxes with discipleship. Rather evangelism informs discipleship and discipleship informs evangelism. That is, evangelism and discipleship operate more as a cycle – evangelism is undertaken with the goal of discipleship and discipleship should in turn prepare disciples for evangelism.
- **Discipleship as Behavioral Modification** – Much of our discipleship in our traditional SBC churches has been focused on external moralistic change instead of inward spiritual transformation. This results in either self-righteous pride because we’ve made the external changes or condemning guilt because we’ve not been able to perform...but it does not result in transformational discipleship.
- **One Dimensional View of Discipleship** – Too often, discipleship is seen only through the lens of informational transfer, while leaving out the other aspects of discipleship, i.e., community, service, mission and evangelism. A lack of a holistic view of discipleship leads to incomplete or non-discipleship.

- **Wrong Exegesis of the Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20** – Historically, we’ve looked at the great commission and said that the command is “to go”. However, grammatically there is only one command in this whole passage, and that command is surrounded by three participles. The one command being communicated is simply, *Make Disciples*... That is, Jesus wasn’t giving a suggestion to His disciples here... He wasn’t laying out a good option for them to consider... no He was giving them a command that was as binding as any other command He had given. The three participles are “going, baptizing, and teaching.”

  - Engaging - “As you are going” – The implication here is it’s not a place, but a lifestyle and it’s not a program, but a process (that is, Jesus is concerned with us being in the process of making disciples).
  - Evangelizing – “make disciples.”
  - Enlisting – “baptizing” –
  - Establishing – “teaching...”
  
- **Lack of a Discipleship Strategy** – Biblical discipleship and disciple making cannot happen haphazardly or accidentally, or even naturally. Intentionality is required. There must be a plan, a strategy, an approach, as it were, in place or disciple making will not become a lifestyle. Without a full-fledged commitment and a well thought through strategy, disciple making will only be a pipe dream – a fleeting good intention.
  
- **Seeing Discipleship as a Separate Ministry of the Church** – We tend to compartmentalize discipleship as one ministry among many in our churches. However,

discipleship encompasses all the ministries and includes the whole process of your strategy, not just a component of it.

## II. Definitions

**Intro:** What is discipleship? What is a disciple? There is often an assumption made that we know what these words and concepts mean. But often that is not the case. These misconceptions about definitions often lead to lifestyles that reflect these misconceptions. We will begin with the meaning of the word disciple.

### A. Meaning of Disciple

**Intro:** The word “disciple” is used more frequently than “Christian” in the New Testament to refer to a believer. The repeated usage tells us that being a “disciple” is the essential identity of the believer. In summary, a disciple of Christ could be seen to have the following characteristics from its usage in the gospels, Acts, and its implied usage in the Epistles.

- *A Spiritually Born Child of God* – There is no distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple. A disciple is a Christian and a Christian is a disciple. A disciple is not a second level commitment to Christ. When a person through spiritual regeneration repents of sin and places faith in Christ, at that moment he becomes a disciple. Michael J. Wilkins says the following:

*“Some ministries refer to those only with advanced commitment as “disciples.” This implies that those with less commitment are not disciples. Instead, we should*

*call all believers disciples and those with advanced commitment something like “mature disciples.”*

- *A Learner* – The basic meaning of the term “disciple” is learner. A disciple of Christ is one who *devoted to the Apostles doctrine* (Acts 2:42). Jesus invested Himself in teaching His disciples. Jesus asked us to make disciples and teach them everything He commanded. That is, we must be learners of His word in order to train other “disciples” in God’s word.
- *A Person With Exclusive Loyalty to Jesus* - A disciple of Jesus is much more than someone who follows His teachings...it is one who follows His Person – someone who has given exclusive allegiance to Him. A disciple does not just follow Jesus’ example, but is in a vibrant relationship with Him that outweighs all other relationships. A disciple is one who has counted the cost of following Jesus, and has found the cost worth it and has made the decision to enter into the narrow gate of salvation.
- *A Person in Community* - A disciple is one whose closest human relationships are with other disciples in the context of God’s chosen means of community – the church.
- *A Person Making Other Disciples* – Jesus made it clear in several passages; most notably Matthew 28:19-20, that a disciple is to, as a way of life, seek to multiply himself. A disciple is one who has been called to minister in the area of disciple making.

## **B. The Meaning of Discipleship**

**Intro:** Discipleship is a term derived from disciple, but

does not in fact appear in Scripture. However, obviously the concept of discipleship permeates the Scriptures. Michael J. Wilkins explains, “*Discipleship is the ongoing process of growth as a disciple.*” Discipleship is living life in all its aspects in union with Christ and being conformed to his image. Discipleship has its ultimate goal the conformity of the student/disciple to the image of the Master/ Christ. Discipleship is not to be narrowly defined to mean simply a training time or a discipleship program. It cannot be seen as just one of the ministries of the church. Discipleship encompasses all the church does collectively and what the Christian does individually. Discipleship is a way of life for all of life. In essence, discipleship is the process of following Christ.

### **Discipleship In Summary**

- *Begins at Salvation* – Just as spiritual regeneration immediately marks one as a disciple, becoming a disciple begins immediately the process of discipleship. Christianity without discipleship is not in essence Christianity. Justification cannot be separated from sanctification and becoming a Christian cannot be separated from becoming like Christ.
- *Conformity to the Likeness of Christ* – The ultimate goal of discipleship is, by living in a vibrant union with Christ, to be conformed in character and conduct to the image of Christ.

*“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*

**(Romans 8:29) (ESV)**

- *A Process, but not a Production* – Discipleship is a process. It does not and cannot happen over a short period. It has an end that will never be reached in this life. Therefore, it is a daily on-going, life long process. However, being that it is a process does not mean that it is a production plan. That is, disciples can't be produced with the same precision and exactness that cars are produced on the assembly line. Intentionality and systematic processes are helpful and essential for discipleship. However, God's way of making disciples is sometimes unpredictable, not always smooth or symmetrical.
- *Encompasses all of Life* – Discipleship is not confined to a program in the church nor a time of training we have once a week. There is no part of life that discipleship does not impact. In essence, discipleship training is all of life experience. And in the same way that sanctification touches all of life, so does discipleship.
- *Has a Missional Aim* – The life of growing as a disciple has as its mission making other disciples and discipling them. The life of discipleship is one of reproduction. As Robert Coleman remarks in his classic work, The Master Plan of Evangelism:

*"It all comes back to His disciples. They were the van-guard of His enveloping movement. "Through their word" He expected others to believe on Him (John 17:20), and these in turn to pass the word along to*



*others, until in time the world might know Who He was and what He came to do (John 17:21, 23). His whole evangelistic strategy—indeed, the fulfillment of His very purpose in coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave—depended upon the faithfulness of His chosen disciples to this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce. This was the way His Church was to win—through the dedicated lives of those who knew the Savior so well that His Spirit and method constrained them to tell others. As simple as it may seem, this was the way the Gospel would conquer. He had no other plan.”*

### **III. Discipleship Implementation Principles**

- **Develop a Theology of Discipleship for the Church -** Make sure your people have a biblical understanding of disciple and discipleship. The theological implication is that all believers are disciples. Non-discipleship Christianity is a misnomer. The practical implication is that all believers are on a pathway of discipleship.

*“The common teaching is that a Christian is someone who by faith accepts Jesus as Savior, receives eternal life, and is safe and secure in the family of God; a disciple is a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others. But I must be blunt: I find no biblical evidence for a separation of Christian from disciple.” – Bill Hull*

- **Preach on Discipleship** – I preached a sermon series entitled: *Discipleship: What it Means to Follow Jesus*. In this series, we covered different aspects of discipleship...the call, the cost, the content, the content, the community, the commission and the genuineness of discipleship.
- **Emphasize Relationships as an Essential Element of Discipleship** – Our American individualistic mindset profoundly affects discipleship. We tend to view discipleship more individualistic than organic; more programmatic than dynamic; and more private than public. In general, American Christians, if they even want spiritual growth, want it without the interdependent relationships that are necessary for it to properly occur. As Eric Geiger writes in his book *Transformational Discipleship*, “No believer is transformed alone.”

“Discipleship requires real teaching and real learning. It requires conversation, modeling, encouragement, debriefing, and practice, all of which need to happen in the *context of relationship*. *Without relationship* between believers, there is no model to follow, no authenticity, no accountability, no application, and no support for the journey.” – Jim Putman
- **Emphasize the Cost of Discipleship** – The reason why we have so many unhealthy SBC churches spread across the US is that we didn’t emphasize the cost of discipleship from the beginning of people’s spiritual journey. Jesus emphasized counting the cost when He called people to follow Him.

*“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” – Bonhoeffer (Cost of Discipleship)*

- **Have a Make Disciples Instead of a Make Decisions Strategy** -The Great Commission is all about making disciples, not merely concentrating on counting decisions. You can manipulate and cheapen the Gospel and gain a lot of decisions...but you never seeing Jesus doing that...He called people to discipleship...to follow Him. The way we do church and do evangelism sometimes communicates to people that it is more important to accept Christ than actually following Him.
- **Make Sure the Gospel is at the Center of Your Discipleship** – Gospel-centered discipleship is an antidote to a moralistic centered discipleship. So what we have in many of our churches from the pulpit to the classroom is preaching and teaching that is built around pragmatics and a moralistic religion that says, “You need to do this and don’t need to do that...”, the Gospel is not merely good advice about how to live, but it is Good News about what God has done to provide for our salvation, our sanctification, and ultimate glorification...true spiritual victory comes from abiding in-dwelling on, thinking about, standing in awe of what Christ has done for us.

*“If people in our churches graduate from the gospel, they are not advancing to spiritual maturity but rather to lifeless religion, moralistic self-righteousness, or performance-based faith inaccurately called Christian. Only Jesus has the power to melt our hearts; thus there is no transformation apart from the truth of the gospel.”* - Transformational Discipleship

- **Define What a Healthy Disciple Looks Like** - There are several reasons why defining what a healthy (or mature) disciple looks like is important. Obviously, if Jesus told us to “make disciples”, not only do we need to know what a disciple is, but also what a mature one looks like. As previously discussed, all believers are disciples, but not all disciples are mature. What kind, or quality of disciple are we, is the question that we want to answer. Another purpose for attempting to develop a definition and/or traits of a healthy disciple is we need a goal... we need to know what we are aiming at. That is, we need to have a concrete picture of the end goal of our discipleship strategy. A third reason, that borrows from the first two, for defining maturity is to clear up confusion among our congregants. If people have their own, or no definition of Christian maturity, then ministry confusion and deviation will result.
- **Develop a Discipleship Strategy** – Just because you preach sermons and have Sunday School classes, don’t assume that holistic biblical discipleship is going to happen in your church. There must be a plan, a strategy, an approach in place or disciple making will not become a lifestyle.

- **Have a Philosophy of Reproduction as Part of the Discipleship Strategy** - Many times our discipleship is not working because we're locked in a close system, that is, we've reduced spiritual development to an in-house non threatening experience...we talk to ourselves, we interact about ourselves, and we address issues about us! This reproductive aspect of discipleship is not going to be produced by programs and preaching...they are good and necessary, but they are limited in their effectiveness in producing disciples that reproduce. The life of discipleship is one of reproduction with a relational investment.
- **Do Not Over Program Early in the Discipleship Process** – What we tend to do is overload in one area on the discipleship process (usually in the content area) and that will bog people down and keep them from going deeper in the discipleship process.
- **Correctly Divine a Win in the Discipleship Process** –A win is not gathering as many people as possible to the event, group etc., but rather helping as many people as possible become who God intended them to be.

#### IV. Discipleship Strategy

##### A. A Balanced Church Program of Discipleship

- **Matthew 14** -- we see Jesus discipling in the context of: the large group (vs. 13-21), the small group (vs. 22-27) and individually (vs. 28-33)

1. One on one or two
2. Small groups – out of the small group you can meet individually with members of that group and do one on one.
3. Congregation

### **B. Jonathan Dodson’s Strategy- “Gospel-Centered Discipleship”**

- Three aspects – rational (learner), relational (family), and missional (missionary).
- All three of these aspects are contained within the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 – *going* indicates the missional, *baptizing* indicates the relational (but also missional), and *teaching* represents the rational.
- All three of these components of a holistic discipleship fit into a strategy of what Dodson suggests are three conversions of the Christian – conversion to Christ (rational belief and faith), conversion to the church or community (relational) and conversion to mission (missional)
- The idea is that an effective strategy must emphasize the three conversions that contain the rational, relational and missional components of a disciple.

### **C. Eric Russ’s Strategy – “Discipleship Defined”**

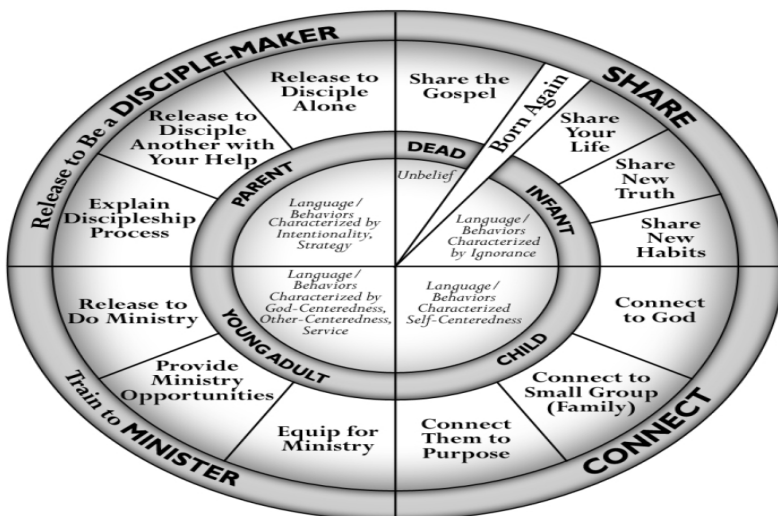
- Discipleship has three components – *word, ministry, and relationship*.
- *Word* implies “teaching disciples to obey all that Christ commanded and modeled throughout the scriptures.”

- *Ministry* is “training disciples in service and evangelism.”
- *Relationship* refers to “building relationships that feature love, commitment, and intentionality.”
- These three components must be balanced within any strategy in order for discipleship to be holistic and healthy.
- These three components of discipleship are to have three outcomes - *walk by faith* - “...the continual demonstration of one’s shift from their old life under ownership of self and Satan to their new life under ownership of God”, *communicating their faith* - “...Jesus wants ministry to be a lifestyle. God expects all believers to be His messengers in sharing the Gospel with the unbelieving world;” and *multiplying their faith* - “Implicit in the command “Make Disciples” is that when we train a person to walk by faith and communicate their faith, they are in turn expected to multiply their faith.”
- Discipleship requirements are fulfilled through two components, individual and communal or one-on-one and small groups

#### **D. Jim Putman Strategy – “Real Life Discipleship”**

- His definition of a disciple is built off of Matthew 4:19:
  - **“Come, follow me”**: a disciple knows and follows Christ (*head*).
  - **“And I will make you”**: a disciple is being changed by Christ (*heart*).
  - **“Fishers of men”**: a disciple is committed to the mission of Christ (*hands*).

- His Method of Discipleship (Strategy)
  - Jesus was an intentional leader
  - Jesus did His disciple-making in a relational environment
  - Jesus followed a process that can be learned and repeated.
- ***An intentional leader + a relational environment + a reproducible process = an infinite number of disciples.***
- Reproducible Process - *Share, Connect, Minister, Disciple* (SCMD)



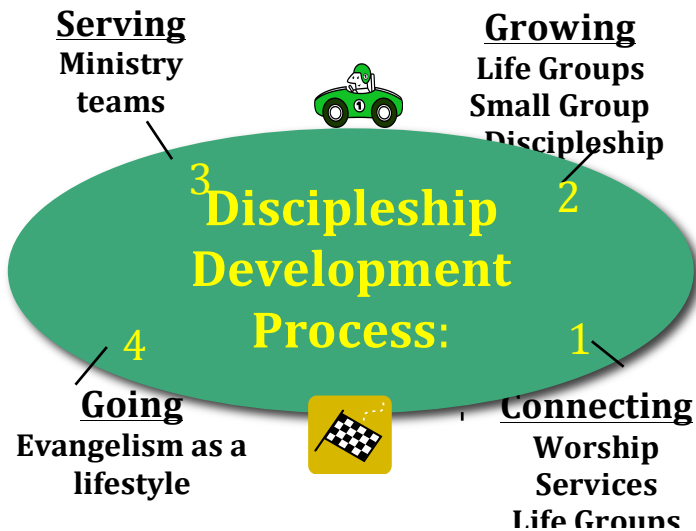


## E. WCHBC Strategy

- Our Strategy of Discipleship was influenced by the simple church process revealed in the book: *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*.
- The authors define Simple Church as, “a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.
- Four aspects that are the thrust of the concept – *clarity, movement, alignment and focus*, guide the Simple Church process.
  - *Clarity* is the master blueprint about how you are going to build disciples. It is clearly defining how the church is structured to bring people toward spiritual maturity.
  - *Movement* “is the sequential steps in the process that causes people to move to greater levels of commitment.” Ordering the programs of ministry to reflect your process is the effect of movement.
  - *Alignment* is “the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same process.” *Alignment* assures that the church body is operating under the same ministry blueprint.
  - *Focus* is the “commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process.” *Focus* keeps the process

from bogging down at specific stages in the discipleship strategy.

- Discipleship Development Process: We envision a church where our people are *connecting* with God, *growing* in Christ-likeness, *servicing* in joy, and *going* to evangelize.
- Our strategy stressed sequential stages of spiritual growth.



The characteristics of each step are summarized in chart 3:

### Chart 3 WCHBC's Four-Step Discipleship Development - Characteristics

WCHBC's Stages of Discipleship Development	Characteristics
Connecting with God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A saving relationship with God through Christ.</li> <li>• Living daily lives of worship and prayer.</li> <li>• Participating in Sunday Morning time of worship.</li> </ul>
Growing in Christ-likeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentional in <i>training ourselves for godliness</i>.</li> <li>• Looking at daily experiences and everyday occurrences as spiritual growth opportunities.</li> <li>• Involved in a small group discipleship class.</li> </ul>
Serving in Joy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live our everyday lives (as mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, employers and employees, teachers and students etc.) as servants.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will use our talents and gifts to serve in at least one ministry in the church.</li> </ul>
Going to Evangelize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personally sharing Christ – we will be making disciples.</li> <li>As a body will connect with our community, serve our community; take the gospel to our community.</li> </ul>

- The Fourth Step in Our Discipleship Strategy Included a One-on One Disciple Making Strategy**  
 Several general principles were developed that concern strategy for disciple making. The first principle was
  - Modeling Discipleship*- An effective strategy requires that the disciple model before those he disciples how faith works out in his own life.
  - Multiply Disciples* - Four practical steps were presented to perform the multiplying task –
    - Intentionality through Prayerful Observation,*
    - Identify the Type of Discipleship Relationship (New Believers, Existing Believers, Non-Believers)*
    - Investigate the Candidate for the Discipleship Relationship (F.A.T. Criteria)*

– *Initiate the Discipleship Relationship*

**Traits of a Healthy Disciple**

<b>Traits</b>	<b>Description</b>
Worship of God	Worship God <i>corporately</i> by gathering <i>weekly</i> together in a local fellowship and <i>privately</i> by living our lives <i>daily</i> in prayer, devotion, service, and surrender to Him.
Reliance on the Spirit of God	Walking daily in the Spirit by seeking the Spirit's filling; depending on the Spirit's guidance and empowering; and manifesting the Spirit's fruit.
Practice the Spiritual Disciplines	Utilize daily Scripture, prayer and other means (spiritual disciplines) in order to grow in godliness.
Cross-Centered Living	Learning daily to live our identity in Christ as those who have died to sin and are alive to righteousness, which manifest itself in self-denial, Godward obedience and personal holiness.
Maturing in Community	Committed to relationships within the context of the local church through large group worship and small group Bible study/fellowship where spiritual growth is enhanced.

Serving in Joy	Utilizing Spiritual gifts and God given talents for joy-filled service within the body of Christ and in the world.
Making Disciples	Committed to making disciples through personal evangelism in word and deed and discipling converts to maturity.

### **Books on Discipleship**

*The Mater Plan of Evangelism* – Robert Coleman  
*The Cost of Discipleship* – Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
*Life Together* - Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
*Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* – Michael J. Wilkins  
*Gospel Centered Discipleship* – Jonathan Dodson  
*Radical* – David Platt  
*The Complete Book on Discipleship - Bill Hull*  
*The Disciple Making Church* – Bill Hull  
*Rediscovering Discipleship* – Robby Gallaty  
*Discipling* – Mark Dever  
*Discipleship Essentials* – Greg Ogden  
*Transforming Discipleship* – Greg Ogden  
*Real Life Discipleship* – Jim Putman  
*Discipleship Defined* – Eric Russ  
*Transformational Discipleship*- Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley and Philip Nation

