

Discipleship and Discipling Following Jesus with Fairview Baptist Church

Definitions and Goals

"In your church, is it difficult to be a nominal, isolated, or anonymous Christian?"

This penetrating question was asked at a past pastor's conference. This question takes into account the levels of maturity, stages of life, and appropriate contexts of the congregation. Nevertheless, it is important to critically examine and assess how we are doing in this area of congregational life.

However, before we begin assessing that question, we need to remind ourselves of that first clause: "In your church..." In order for us to faithfully consider discipleship and discipling, we need a firm understanding of what the church is. A local church is a regenerated people who, baptized in the Triune name, regularly gather in the name of the Lord Jesus and under the authority of God's Word to proclaim the gospel to those who are affirmed of heavenly citizenship visualized through the ordinances. Local churches are embassies of God's kingdom to render decisions on earth on behalf of heaven. With this biblical truth, the life of the congregation is consumed with the love of God, grace of Christ, and fellowship with the Spirit. It's one another-ly.

Speaking of congregational life, let's offer a couple definitions. Discipleship is our personal following of Jesus. Discipling is our helping one another follow Jesus by deliberately doing spiritual good to them. With this distinction, let's offer the main goal for congregational life in five ways:

The congregation is eagerly discipling one another by:

- 1) Caring for one another with the Word through bearing sins and sorrows.
- 2) Building up one another with the Word through edification and exhortation.
- 3) Loving one another with the Word through forgiving and forbearing.
- 4) Encouraging one another with the Word through song and prayer.
- 5) Blessing one another with the Word through hospitality and service.

One Another Passages

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). Saying that church members are responsible to love one another is almost like saying birds have a responsibility to fly. Affection for God's people defines our new identity in Christ (1 Jn. 4:7). In the New Testament, love is tangible, active, and expressed through service. Every church member is responsible to fulfill the "one another" passages of the New Testament, of which are over 50.

If we take responsibility to love one another, then we'll actively seek to be discipled and disciple others. In this way, the whole church "builds itself up" in love (Eph. 4:15-16). We won't be passive about the church's unity, but eager to maintain and promote a spirit of unity in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). We won't leave wandering members behind, but pursue them for their good (cf. Matt. 18:10-14). We'll take prayer seriously (1 Thess. 5:16; Eph. 6:18), bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), show hospitality

(Rom. 12:13), put others' interests ahead of our own (Phil. 2:4), and seek to develop meaningful relationships.¹

False Assumptions

Professional vs. Congregational

This false assumption says that the discipling and care of members' is the responsibility of professional pastors and not the congregation. It would make church life a lot easier if the responsibility and culpability of members' maturing in Christ were only the professionals. However, Ephesians 4:12 notes the leaders of the church are the ones leading, training, and equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Indeed, there is no congregational life if the congregation is not wholly involved.

Structural vs. Ordinary

This false assumption says that spiritual growth is fixed or found in more events, programs, or structures. Or, it may say that the primary discipling happens in events, programs, or structures. Now, let's be clear, there's nothing inherently wrong or sinful with events, programs, or structures. However, relying on external matters will not address internal matters. The ordinary life of the Christian is pretty plain and yet very messy. As this is the case, we need care for, build up, and love one another in the ordinary & plain ways of life. Certainly, men's and women's retreats are fun and wonderful events. Yet, if there is no ordinary discipling going on, structural fixes will only address external matters.

Private vs. Personal

This false assumption says that the Christian life is not merely personal but private. There is no necessity for other people to know my private business, sin, or needs. This false assumption might also carry hidden fears of judgment, shame, or not wanting to be a burden. However, the 50+ one another New Testament passages paint a different picture. Acknowledging the fears of shame and judgment, Colossians 3:12-17 speak of congregational life that is unrelenting in its love, holiness, forgiveness, humility, forbearance, and unity. The Christian life is not only others-oriented, but honest and open.

Culture of Discipling

This might be a phrase you've heard before, but you're not quite sure what it means. By culture we mean the ethos or the shared values, goals, and practices that characterize a group. Discipling one another is not a program or activity, but an inherent characteristic of the local church. Out of love for one another, we desire to see it normal for members to take the initiative to deliberately do spiritual good toward one another. This sort of culture doesn't need sign-ups or permission, but is doing the ordinary work of ministry: building up the saints in love.

Deepak Reju gives a few helpful points on fostering and cultivating this culture of discipling:

¹ From Sam Emadi's ["What Are the Responsibilities of Church Membership"](#)

- 1) The Word is central to confront, instruct, & console us.
- 2) Meaningful Membership²
- 3) Use small groups to get people into 1-on-1 discipling relationships
- 4) Leaders initiate and model
- 5) Reproducible fruit
- 6) Teach it
- 7) Set expectations as individuals become members
- 8) Regularly check in on members
- 9) Make and keep normal conversations spiritual.
- 10) Pray

Obstacles to Discipling

Recognizing and acknowledging the various obstacles and excuses we use for discipling and being disciplined is crucially important. Further, being open and honest about our individual obstacles will aide us as we seek to follow Jesus and deliberately do spiritual good toward one another. Deepak Reju offers five obstacles to discipling:

- 1) Too busy
- 2) It's not that important
- 3) A preference to exist with masks when they are at church
- 4) No desire to get involved in the messiness
- 5) Too quick to pass off problems to pastors or counselors

Encouragement toward Meaningful Membership

Everything we do at Fairview is centered around and governed by God's Word. As such, we entrust the desires of our souls and work of our hands to the glory and enjoyment of our Triune God. Therefore, with our definition of discipling as deliberately doing spiritual good toward one another, let's offer five encouragements toward meaningful membership at Fairview Baptist Church.

Intentional - In the great kindness of his mercy, God chose his people before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated loving initiative toward his disciples. Thus, as we imitate Christ, we should imitate him as we intentionally and deliberately do spiritual good toward others.

Purposeful - In the great wisdom of his power, God has a purpose for his choosing his people: "...go and bear fruit—fruit that will abide" (John 15:16). It is a wonderful testament to God's splendor that he is able to use our feeble, weak, and sinful lives to bear fruit that glorifies God as we deliberately do spiritual good toward others.

² Members of the church should be Christians who regularly attend the public gatherings, view fellow members as their primary fellowship & ministry, and fulfills the biblical privileges and responsibilities of local church membership (Matt. 16:13-20; 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 12:7; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 4:3; 4:15-16; Heb. 10:24-25; 13:7). This draws clear lines, under the gospel message, and distinguishes members and non-members. There is a deep commitment to Christ, holiness, and one another.

Relational - In the great love of his will, God in Christ has called us friends. Once we were enemies of darkness toward God, but in the immutable love of Christ, we are reconciled to the immortal, invisible, all-wise God. If we are to imitate God in Christ, our love for one another ought to be characterized by relational friendship that is captured by the majesty and kindness of God.

Joyful - In the great grace of his glory, God has brought together the unlikeliest of people together under the name of the Triune God. What joy this brings to those bought by Christ. More than that, what hopeful joy this brings in the messiness, hard, and trialsome times in the church.

Normal - In the great splendor of his holiness, God has given this command to all Christians in every local church of all time. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." In Romans 12:10 we are told "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." And in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 we read "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." We could keep going; one of the main concerns of the New Testament writers is that all the Christians in the various churches would be active in encouraging one another in the faith. As a member of Fairview Baptist Church, we want you to help us foster and sustain this culture of discipling.

Resources

[Church Membership Journal](#)

[How Can I Find Someone to Disciple Me?](#)

[How Can I Grow in Hospitality?](#)

[How Can I Serve My Church?](#)

[Is it Loving to Practice Church Discipline?](#)

[Why Should I Join a Church?](#)

[Discipling](#)

[Church Membership](#)

[What is a Healthy Church?](#)

[The Compelling Community](#)

[Word Centered Church](#)

Note: Much of this restates what the ministry of gMarks has articulated elsewhere. The biblical vision here is indebted to that ministry.