



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**The Christian Worldview Concept of Discipleship**  
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**The Context of the Discipleship Problem**

Over the last two to three generations in America, the culture has changed dramatically. There are many manifestations of this change. Obviously there has been massive advancement in technology and a refinement of many of the implements we use in the living of daily life. But just as great are the changes that have occurred in the non-material elements of the culture – the symbols we use to express ourselves, expressions we use in language, and the values and norms which characterize our society. There is no question but that we have moved from a culture which used to be dominated by Christian Theism to one which is now massively influenced by a naturalistic worldview. This cultural shift has had a monumental influence on every segment of society, but perhaps no one's world has been shaken as much by this as those who claim a biblical worldview.

Throughout most of the history of our nation, there has not been a true cultural competitor to the Christian values which characterized the nation's founding, much less one which had the ability to actually demonstrate dominance. But over the last couple of decades, that has all changed. Naturalistic belief has increasingly come to dominate the major institutions of our culture.

As would be expected, this change is overtly expressed in the daily life of those who live in the culture. We see it in the rampant sexual immorality that is now commonly accepted, the open practice of dirty and dishonest political chicanery, the assertion of non-science as science for the purpose of advancing political and social change,

the blatant attempt to use lies and deception in the news media to influence society and on and on.

While these changes have been gradually progressing for well over a century, the rapid cultural deterioration we now see only began in recent generations. We reached a tipping point around the 1960s and 70s as the naturalistic worldview began to overtake the traditional beliefs of the nation's founding. And quite frankly, for the most part, the church and the Christian community have been completely caught off guard by this massive shift.

**Defining the Discipleship Problem**

There are, of course, many things the church does to express itself. That said, most of them occur within the four walls of the church building and only have an effect on those who go to church. It is not that these things are unimportant – things such as worship, Bible study, and Christian fellowship – but they only express a portion of God's purpose. In big picture terms, God's purpose in creating the world and mankind was to create and facilitate an opportunity for personal relationship. But it is not just those already participating in the ministry of the church that God is trying to reach. If it were, then simply doing our thing within the four walls of the church building would be good enough. But according to God's revelation, he wants to reach the entire world – every single person.

If we actually believe this is God's purpose, it should have a profound impact on what we do to reach outside the church's walls to touch the lives of lost individuals and promote God's will on earth (in the culture) as it is in heaven. The problem is, because of the societal shift that has taken place in our nation,

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Christians have found themselves unprepared to make an impact in the new cultural surroundings. There are lots of churches, many of them very active, with all kinds of programs. But in the middle of it all, there seems to be a massive shortage of believers who are willing and able to confront the godlessness in the culture with the gospel. And sadly, even most of those who want to don't have the knowledge, skills or confidence to go after it. And even more tragically, the theological foundation in many of our churches excuse people in their shallowness.

To turn this around, it will be necessary for believers, in mass, to intentionally prepare themselves, then go out and challenge the anti-God people and values which are taking over the culture. This must begin with a massive rethinking of how we do Christian discipleship training.

Because our Christian faith used to dominate the culture, discipleship training traditionally didn't seem quite so important. Since most people at the very least claimed to be Christians, and the culture itself was thought to be "Christian," there was not an urgency to reach outside the church. The expectation was that non-believers already, at the very least, knew where to find God when they were ready and would come to us. Unfortunately, that mindset lingers and, in general, people connected with our churches are not highly interested in training which will prepare them for a new paradigm.

But what about those who are interested in going to the next level? What do they have to do? Is it just a matter of getting the right education? The truth of the matter is, a person doesn't become a disciple of Christ simply by sitting in a classroom and learning the knowledge

taught in a course of study. The essential seed of Christian discipleship is based on a notion which is different than what most Christians think. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is not simply a person who has become well educated in the tenets of the Christian faith – though that is an essential starting point. Rather, a true disciple of Jesus is one who actually imitates the master's life. It is one who infuses Christ's values in life and expresses his teachings out in the world. It is way more than merely learning information. It involves having one's life transformed to actually "become" like the master.

As we delve into the topic of Christian discipleship, we need to look at it as a comprehensive whole. In order to bring ourselves to the place where we are able to become a true disciple of Christ (become like our master), there are three matters we need to consider: 1. Content (What do believers need to learn?), 2. Process (What is the best way to go about making/becoming disciples?), and 3. Motivation (What needs to happen within the individual to make the transfer from "learner" to true disciple?). All three of these must be included together.

Recently I initiated a discussion on the LinkedIn social media site and asked participants, particularly pastors, to share how they conceive of and do discipleship. There were quite a number of responses and they naturally fell into the three categories just mentioned: content, process, and motivation. Following is a summary of the responses.

### **What Should be the Content of Christian Discipleship Training?**

The content that various people felt should be included in discipleship training touched on just about everything it is possible to teach in the context of the Christian faith. Some of the suggestions were specific training courses created by the individuals themselves or programs published by

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major Christian publishers. Other suggestions included particular topics which individuals felt ought to be studied. These included such things as training believers how to use Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community and common sense, focusing on meeting human need (even above teaching specific skills or doctrinal training), training about how to have a quiet time, and teaching such courses as New Testament survey, Old Testament survey, biblical hermeneutics, journaling, tithing, how to use Bible study tools, spiritual gifts and personalities, church covenant, counseling and apologetics.

## What Should Be the Process for Teaching Christian Discipleship Training?

In the various discussion groups where I asked the question, there were also a lot of suggestions about methods for delivering discipleship training. These suggestions tended to fall into only a few categories but included a lot of different ways of expressing those categories.

## Training Methodology

Some of the suggestions actually offered a specific process or methodology. The various suggestions included such things as: bathing the effort in prayer, basing it on Bible study, building in accountability, providing opportunities for hands on ministry, developing a training calendar, use of a developmental process where people progress through stages of maturity or through a graded program, developing a mentoring approach, creating a full immersion methodology, doing training on an interactive website, focusing on training using personal relationships, gathering a small group of followers and training them, and use of sermons to do the training.

## Leadership

Other suggestions dealt with the “necessity of” and “how tos” of selecting qualified leaders. This included such things as spiritual preparation, getting the church leadership on board, leadership training, regular facilitator feedback meetings, the need for pastoral leadership and/or oversight, and providing autonomy for the leaders.

## Participants

Some of the suggestions related to selection of the participants. Suggestions here included: open it up to everyone, hand select the participants, select people based on their attitudes about their faith and their motivation, and make people ask for the training.

## Group Structure

Still others suggested ideas for actually structuring the training. This included such ideas as using one-on-one training with individuals, training in a classroom setting (small or large groups), using home groups, use of a house church model, making the training part of the church program, providing for training outside the church program, use of video training, use of existing groups in the church (ex., men’s and women’s groups), building in multiplication of groups, and sorting and training people based on spiritual gifting or personality type.

## How Do We Get People Motivated to Become Committed Disciples of Christ?

The motivational aspect of Christian discipleship necessarily falls into two categories, and the comments of those who responded to the LinkedIn question clearly reflected an understanding of that fact. First, Christian leaders who want to lead their people to become more effective disciples must be motivated both to model discipleship in their own lives and to encourage their people to do likewise. Second, individual

Christians must become motivated themselves to become disciples. Here are the main suggestions which were put forth in this category.

### ***Leader's Motivation***

Pastors, in particular, must begin by having their own lives in order by experiencing a vital relationship with God. They must then put forth sufficient effort to clearly identify and focus on personal purpose, vision, mission, and values. Finally, they must become committed to a methodology to encourage discipleship in those they lead.

### ***Generating Motivation in Followers***

Suggestions for encouraging others to become true disciples of Jesus Christ included a number of different possibilities such as: prayer for people, modeling true discipleship before people, clearly sharing vision, intent, and means, making sure people understand the relationship element of discipleship, coaching, coaxing, and cajoling people in their journey, setting high expectations, emphasizing right attitudes as well as right content, building in accountability by practicing church discipline, making sure everyone understands the truth that every believer is called by God into a definite ministry, providing opportunities for people to put what they learn into practice, and making sure the training fits people's learning styles.

### ***Putting it All Together***

There is no question that most of the suggestions above provide some great insight into what should be a top priority for all Christians. Discipleship training is not merely a matter of learning information about the Bible and how to live the Christian life. It relates also to "who we become" as persons, and (maybe surprisingly for some) is based on the essence of a Christian understanding of salvation.

Many people understand Christian salvation to relate only to the moment an individual invites Christ into one's life. That is certainly the beginning point (what we refer to as justification), but Christian salvation is not simply a moment in time. It begins at justification but continues on from there as a process which goes on throughout the rest of our mortal lives (sanctification), then on into eternity (glorification). When we consider the topic of discipleship training, what we are really dealing with is the sanctification element of our salvation – the process of becoming spiritually mature (becoming more and more like Christ) throughout the rest of our mortal lives. Because every part of the salvation process is part of a

comprehensive whole, it is not unfair to actually call into question the salvation of those who don't take seriously the sanctification element of the process.

I realize and accept that there are many ways to understand and promote the discipleship process. My personal explanation here is not meant to set aside other explanations or plans, but is simply my way of expressing the basic concepts which are involved. In fact, this is not even intended to be a plan at all, only an explanation about what true Christian discipleship involves. It is my prayer that this explanation will serve as a catalyst both to encourage people to become more intentional in their discipleship training efforts and to encourage leaders to actually implement some kind of process to promote spiritual growth in those they lead.

For my part, I see the discipleship process to be a comprehensive engagement of the whole person. It is not merely content, a process for delivering content, or even the motivation for taking on the content. It involves all three – all at the same time. It involves creating continual change in every part of our person – our soul, body and spirit. Let's take a moment to see how these three elements of our personhood affect our discipleship efforts.

### ***Soul***

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ certainly involves learning content – which is a function of our soul. Our soul, in this context, specifically engages our mind and our will. There are numerous topics which can be studied to give us the intellectual foundation for discipleship – many which are listed above. That said, I am going to name three topics which I believe are the most basic and which should serve as the context for all the others.

First we must learn the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. This specifically includes our understanding of God, man and salvation. These three doctrines define the line around the Christian faith which cannot be violated and one still be a Christian.

The second foundation stone is an understanding of worldview. In our modern pluralistic world, I believe it is critical for every Christian to have this knowledge. It is important because it helps us sustain our own confidence in the Christian faith in the face of increasingly fierce opposition. It is also important because it gives us an understanding of WHY our Christian faith is the truth and other belief systems are not.

My final element of basic content involves how to share our faith. It combines the two foundational elements above in a way that allows us to partner with God to accomplish the very purpose for which he created mankind.

But learning the content must also be associated with our human will. We must make a personal decision that we want to be disciples and put ourselves on a path which will accomplish that purpose.

### **Body**

A second aspect of becoming a disciple of Christ involves using our physical bodies to carry out the work of God in the world. To do that we must specifically engage our emotions and our actions.

Our emotions can be wonderful things when they cause us to feel good. They can also be horrible when they cause us to feel bad. But we should never simply be at the mercy of our emotions. There are times when feeling good works against God's purposes, and other times when feeling bad is the result of working for them. What is necessary is to learn how to put our emotions under the control of our will, and our will under the control of our Lord. With this, we are able to manage our emotions in a way which allows us to become more effective in accomplishing God's purposes.

Another aspect of our discipleship, related to our body, is expressed in our actions. We must recognize that every believer is called by God into the gospel ministry, then begin acting in life based on that. This brings to the forefront the holistic nature of the discipleship process as we see the engagement of the will, the content, the emotions and our relationship with God all coming together to be expressed through our lives.

### **Spirit**

The very core of our being is spirit. We certainly do live in physical bodies, but the essence of our personhood is spirit. We were intentionally created this way by God so that we are able to have a personal relationship with him. In order for us to have the ability to interact with God, we must be spiritual beings because God is Spirit.

To make the connection with God, though, we must become the kind of person who is able to engage that relationship. We must continually work to put aside sin and seek to grow spiritually. God simply will not fellowship with sin. Developing our relationship with

him involves such things as prayer, worship, and Bible study.

### **Discipleship's Essence**

Discipleship absolutely involves what we do. But its essence is something much greater – it relates to who we become. As such, we must make the effort to not only learn the basics of our Christian faith, but must also seriously seek the literal transformation that our salvation has initiated in our lives. Unless we are intentionally working to become more mature and committed disciples of Jesus Christ, our very salvation can be called into question.

As such, every believer should make discipleship training a personal priority – until the day of physical death. Additionally, every church should make providing discipleship training opportunities a priority. This is the key to not only becoming the person God wants us to be, but to also impacting the world according to the very purpose of God.

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