

GRACE|DC

DISCIPLESHIP

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

A disciple worships and imitates Jesus in all areas of life. Two words come to mind when we think of discipleship: *worshipper* and *apprentice*. It's not enough simply to imitate Jesus—we must find ourselves, like the disciple Thomas, falling to our knees and exclaiming, “My Lord and My God!” And yet worship from the Bible's point of view is always a whole-life event—expressed in and through every aspect of our lives: vocations, relationships, art, citizenship, etc. Much like an apprentice is shaped by his master, a disciple is being renewed with the mind and life of Christ in every way. This call to worship and imitate Jesus is a call to lay down our lives (perhaps literally), yet the reward is beyond measure.

Where does Discipleship occur?

Discipleship occurs in the Church. The Church is where disciples are made.

The church is God's incarnation today. The church is Jesus' body on earth. The church is the temple of the Spirit. The church is not a helpful thing for my individual spiritual journey. The church is the journey. The church is not a collection of “soul-winners” all seeking to tell unbelievers “the Way” to God. The church is the way to God. To be part of the church is to be part of God—to be part of God's Communion and to be part of God's ministry. To belong to the people of God is to enjoy relationship with God and live out the purposes of God. The church is God's present-day word and witness to an unbelieving world. And, most importantly, the church is the only true means to be transformed into the likeness of God. —T. Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian*

Jesus placed priority on the Church and so we must. This is not to exclude our individual relationships with God—if neglected we will feel like an acquaintance of God, rather than a beloved son or daughter. But, as the Church is the Body and Temple of Christ, and discipleship entails being shaped by Him, we *must* be engaged in the Church to become like Him. This includes being engaged in the mission of the Church. A disciple participates in Jesus' worldwide mission to gather people from every tongue, tribe and nation.

How does Discipleship occur?

Discipleship takes place with multiple persons. For those who have grown up in the Church, or have been Christians for some time there may be certain models that come to mind—both formal and informal: *Discipleship means a person [one primary mentor]...Discipleship means a program [book or curriculum]...Discipleship is just spending time together.* All of these are legitimate models, yet none in and of itself is sufficient. If discipleship entails becoming a whole-life worshipper, as well as an apprentice of Jesus, it needs to take place with multiple persons. The person who serves as a discipler for your marriage may not be the best one for your vocation. The person who brings you along theologically may not be the best one to show you God through the arts. This releases the one being disciplined from looking to a finite person for everything and requires us to learn from everybody. It also frees the discipler from guilt for not being everything to everyone, as well as from an unhealthy desire for influence. No one—pastors, elders, lay leaders—can be expected to serve as

the primary discipler. We look for God to use many people, understanding that Jesus by way of the Holy Spirit *is* the primary Discipler.

Discipleship takes place in multiple contexts. At Grace DC we also imagine discipleship will occur in many contexts: during worship services, alone with God, while discussing a film, while tutoring a child, or as we hone our talents at work. This relates to our belief that disciples are called not merely to personal worship and piety, but to engage every area of life—which only happens as we are being disciplined in a whole-life manner. The multiple contexts and personalities involved in discipleship call us to be wide-eyed for God’s shaping influence.

Discipleship occurs through the “means of grace,” used corporately and individually. God tells us that there are certain means through which His powerful grace flows, by which the Spirit of Christ resides and rules in our lives: the *Word* which God inspired and inhabits, the *Sacraments* wherein Christ is present, *Prayer* by which we both experience and communicate with God. This is why weekly worship with the Church is so formative, for it is there that all the above take place. And, as we learn to worship together publicly we’re also learning how to do it privately. These means pursued publicly and privately are used by the Spirit help us to become worshippers and apprentices. The Bible teaches us that transformation occurs by seeing the glory of God and because of the grace of God. If we’re not regularly using the means we won’t get *before* God’s glory, or *to* the grace God has for us—consequently, nothing will change. This takes discipline and intentionality. The Apostle Paul likened it to athletic or military training. Together we spur one another to press on.

How will Discipleship be facilitated at Grace DC?

Discipleship is facilitated at Grace DC through membership, worship services, community groups, service opportunities and Christian education. Here are some ways you can be disciplined:

- 1) *Through Membership.* This is the best way for the leaders of the church to know you and fulfill their call to equip and encourage you.
- 2) *Through the Worship Service.* Make weekly worship your top priority (even if you’re traveling). Also, come to the worship service as a worshipper, not a consumer. Pray for God to meet us there and expect He will. Come looking for opportunities to listen and love others.
- 3) *Through Community Groups.* Community Groups (CG’s) are the *primary* context for discipleship at Grace DC. They are the place where we unpack our Sunday worship, share the means of grace, bring our joys and burdens, and come to know others and be known (confessing, confronting, supporting). It is the place where the Two Great Commandments become real (the book of 1 John teaches that our love for God is only as good as our love for others). The pastors/elders at Grace DC oversee, encourage and equip the CG leaders so they can encourage and equip others. CG’s are also the “front lines” for pastoral care, and the place where the leadership learns of pastoral needs.
- 4) *Through Prayer Meetings:* The entire Christian life intersects with prayer. Our hearts and minds are shaped through prayer. Our relationships deepen as we rejoice over answered prayers and present one another’s needs to God. Vision for Kingdom work is inspired and triggered in prayer. And, the strength of God’s Spirit comes to us in prayer.
- 5) *Through Service.* Jesus’ parable of the sheep and goats, and also the book of James, teach that when we face the Lord, He won’t need to test us on our theology. He’ll simply look at our deeds, which serve as the true story of our theology. Discipleship which only occurs over conversation and books pretends that we are disembodied minds, and is a commitment to a *theoretical* life only (not whole-life). Jesus opposed this kind of religion. Through serving one another and our city the life of Jesus is at work in us.

6) *Through Education.* We are not opposed to discipleship of the mind! It is critical. Here are some of the ways you can grow in knowledge at Grace DC:

- CG Bible study (weekly) and CG Leader's Training (monthly and by invitation)
- Weekly/monthly prayer meetings
- Membership Seminar
- Spring Theology Seminar
- Singleness/Dating/Marriage Seminar
- Weekend Conferences (e.g. Perfectionism Conference)
- Annual church retreat
- Topical classes (e.g. Christian worldview)
- Missions presentations
- Arts/culture: Brewing Culture, Grace DC Arts, Grace DC Bookclub
- Resources: book table, sermons, and papers on website
- Vocational discussion groups/mentoring (an idea in the wings)
- Resources in the broader Christian community of DC which we publicize to the congregation