

Discipling: Comparing the Approaches

By Harold Bullock

The words of Christ in the Great Commission are frequently misinterpreted in two ways: first, the command is actually to “disciple” or “make disciples” not just to “teach;” second, we are to be teaching the disciples **not** merely “all that I have commanded you,” but “**to obey** all that I have commanded you.”

Recently there has been an increasing discontent with the usual approach to Christian training that is heavily information-oriented but seems to produce little in the realm of obedience.

A reading of the Gospels and Letters will show that both the Lord and the Apostles had goals for the individual Christian to be a person of Christlike character. A study of the instructional methods of Jesus and Paul will reveal that the methods of both were more complex than mere “classes” or “courses.” Both heavily relied on example setting, situational training, and apprenticeship in addition to large group teaching.

In the last several years different people have published approaches to Christian training that utilize information plus exempling and apprenticeship in various ways to produce mature disciples. We will look at six systems for “discipling” believers, the levels of training they set up, and evaluate their strengths and limits. The first three have been developed within para-church movements. The second three have arisen with Southern Baptist connections. Each has a contribution to make.

Gary Kuhne

Gary W. Kuhne, formerly of Campus Crusade for Christ and now president of Campus and Lay Mobilization, has written two very practical books that outline his discipling program.

The Dynamics of Personal Follow-up, focusing on the first eleven weeks of Christian growth, gives excellent help on developing one-to-one relationships and dealing with frequently encountered problems.

His second book, **The Dynamics of Discipleship Training**, looks at the qualities that are to be in the life of a discipler, then details how to help a person who has completed follow-up to become disciplined, organized, capable in Bible study, and a contributing part of a Christian fellowship.

Levels of Training. Kuhne sees the training process as first, follow-up, then discipleship training, which he defines as the work of developing spiritual maturity and spiritual reproductiveness in the life of a Christian. The Christian completing follow-up progresses through six levels of development to be completed in about two years:

Level I: Effectiveness in evangelism

Level II: Consistency in growth

Level III: Motivation of others to Christian involvement

Level IV: Doing follow-up with new Christians

Level V: Training others in discipleship training

Level VI: Self starter: being effective apart from input by the trainer.

Limits. The high level of motivation demanded and the amount of and level of reading of the system may restrict its effectiveness to people with a considerable amount of leadership ability. Also, while Kuhne stresses the need for exemplifying by leadership, most of his approach is heavily information oriented.

Strengths. Kuhne gives a **great deal** of practical help in the "how to's" of working one-to-one. He is also one of the few authors to attempt to define terms and use them consistently. Also, his suggested training sequence in discipleship is quite helpful.

Carl Wilson

Carl Wilson, head of worldwide Discipleship Association, Inc., based in Atlanta, has written the book **With Christ in the School of Disciple Building** and extensive support materials to aid in implementing the training programs outlined in the book. Wilson has had experience in campus ministry and in the pastorate.

In the book Wilson first surveys the need for a new approach to disciple building and then turns to the New Testa-

ment to reconstruct the training program Jesus used. In part two of the book Wilson discusses seven steps of disciple building that he derives from an intensive study of a harmony of the gospels. In part three he discusses important principles for implementing a discipling ministry: association, fellowship, involvement, motivation, evangelism, prayer, and application of truth.

Levels of Training. Wilson derives seven steps in the training of Christians. His goal is that the three years of training lay a foundation for growth to maturity and effectiveness. His seven steps in training are:

1. Repentance and faith (Conversion).
2. Enlightenment and guidance (understand who Christ is and how to follow Him).
3. Ministry training and appreciation of benefits (at this point selection of participants begins).
4. Leadership development and government under God.
5. Reevaluation and separation (to Christ from the world).
6. Participation and delegation (deepening relationships within the Body of Christ).
7. Exchanged life and worldwide challenge (resting in the sufficiency of the risen Christ).

Limits. Wilson avoids use of one-to-one training, preferring training in groups only. Wilson's system demands a higher reading level and an ability to assimilate doctrinal ideas quickly. It may have to be "geared down" for some students, especially new Christians.

Strengths. Wilson is the only contemporary author to attempt to extract his whole system from the New Testament. Most other approaches are pragmatic, based on an attempt to meet the needs of growing Christians with Biblical truth.

Wilson is also the only one to attempt to treat the instruction for trainees from a more theological perspective. For instance, his article on baptism in his supporting materials resembles more a theology of baptism than a simple study on baptism for new Christians. Yet, his greater theological approach increases the reading level for learners.

Another unique feature to Wilson (and to me, a strength) is his linking the goals for each new stage of growth to developing a greater level of trust in the living Lord.

LeRoy Eims

LeRoy Eims, at the time of publication of his book **The Lost Art of Disciple Making**, was International Ministry Representative for the Navigators. To my knowledge, of all the current authors of discipling systems, Eims has the longest personal experience in discipling Christians. He has also authored several other books dealing with Christian living and leadership. In **Lost Art**, Eims first looks at the need for multiplying disciples and then at discipleship training in the Bible. He outlines principles and objectives for training Christians through three levels of growth.

The Navigator "2:7 Program" seems to cover many of Eims' first-level training objectives. It is designed for use by career adults in a group setting in a local church.

Levels of Training. Eims sees three basic stages in the training of Christians. The first is for all Christians; the second and third are for those with special gifts and calling.

1. **Establishing:** (two years) helping the learner to move from convert to disciple. To Eims a disciple is someone who openly identifies with Christ, is in fellowship with Christ through the Word and prayer, manifests the fruit of the Spirit and is contributing to the Body of Christ through his gifts.
2. **Equipping:** (two years) from disciple to harvest worker. A worker is someone who will be actively involved in evangelism and training disciples.
3. **In-depth One-to-One:** (three years) from worker to leader. The goal here is to develop someone able to lead out in the establishing of another ministry that will evangelize, establish, equip, and produce new leaders.

Limits. Eims' system, as presented in the book, leaves quite a few gaps in information for the trainer to fill. Learning activities for the first growth stage are fairly well detailed, but information is sketchier for the second and third stages.

Due to the lack of detail his system may be more difficult to implement by persons just getting into discipling.

Strengths. Eims has a strong emphasis on the role of prayer in developing people. His approach to training is slower, more thorough, and works more fully on building internal

motivation in the learner than most of the other approaches. He also gives a stronger role to example and to the trainer personally communicating love and care for the trainee. In my own experience, I find his timetable for growth more realistic, if one measures growth by results in the life of the trainee rather than just "material covered."

Billie Hanks

Billie Hanks, Jr., a Southern Baptist evangelist and president of International Evangelism Association, has produced a well-developed discipleship training system for use on campuses or in local churches. Pastors, staff and lay leaders in 33 states have been trained to use the system. It has been translated into several languages for implementation in Southern Baptist foreign missions work. It is included as part of the curriculum at several Baptist colleges and seminaries.

In working with a given church, International Evangelism Association staff members first lead a Spiritual Growth Conference at the church. The conference consists of three two-hour sessions. The Pastor, staff and key lay leadership of the church next enter a certification process involving 12 hours of video-taped instruction on the Christian Discipleship Seminar Curriculum and a two-day Teacher Certification Conference on how to teach the Christian Discipleship Seminar.

Potential disciplemakers then participate in the Christian Discipleship Seminar in groups of eight to 10 led by a certified instructor. Qualified graduates of the seminar are then paired with younger believers whom they train through a one-to-one relationship, taking them through a two phase program.

Levels of Training. The one-to-one program has two phases of training.

Phase I involves 10 sessions of one-to-one work. During these the trainee works through a 10 session Bible study book, a Scripture Memory book, learns to use a spiritual notebook, reads **Disciples Are Made Not Born** by Walt Henrichsen, and learns to share the gospel.

After Phase I, if the trainee desires, he enters Phase II of one-to-one training containing 26 sessions. Evangelism continues to be emphasized in the second phase as the learner

begins evangelism projects, such as hospital visitation or evangelistic home Bible studies, etc. During Phase II the learner continues use of the spiritual notebook, learns how to do independent Bible study and learns to do one-to-one ministry. By the sixteenth session learners are often involved leading another person in one-to-one training.

Limits. The discipline level is somewhat high for some converts. Current work is being done to prepare materials with less demand for learners of lower educational and motivational levels.

Strengths. There is a good use of one-to-one apprenticeship with the leader setting the example in training situations, and there is strong involvement in evangelism early and throughout the program.

MasterLife

MasterLife Discipleship Training for Leaders, originated by Avery T. Willis, Jr., has been produced by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Two very thorough notebooks have been prepared for the six-month course. The leader of MasterLife must be certified either through attending a one-week intensive training course or graduating from the six-month course under another leader. Certification is required before the leader can order materials to begin a new group.

Levels of Training. MasterLife is a one-level training course with the first half geared toward developing common spiritual disciplines and the second half oriented toward discovering individual strengths and ministries and becoming inner-directed (internally motivated) rather than other-directed. Training occurs in a weekly group of eight to ten persons meeting for check-up on the previous week's assignment and training for the next assignment.

Limits. MasterLife is designed as instruction for people who are **already leaders** in churches, already have some maturity, and who need knowledge and structure to develop basic disciplines and skills in the Christian life. It is heavily content and materials centered but does work strongly for application to daily life. However, considerable time is usually required for value change to sink deeply enough to become a

character trait in an individual. Leaders will need to monitor graduates of the program to see if value changes produced in individuals through the program endure.

Strengths. The material in the notebooks is of high quality, well thought-out and interesting. The notebooks and leadership material are detailed enough that the program could be led easily by a mature person without long-term training. The program has been designed to integrate with local church life but will work in a campus setting equally well.

NSM Discipleship Strategy

The National Student Ministries Discipleship Strategy has been developed by Milt Hughes, National Student Ministries of the Sunday School Board, SBC. The program is designed for use on college campuses and dovetails with Baptist Student Union programs. **MasterLife** is one component in the total strategy.

Levels of Training. Hughes sees four stages in Christian development: beginning, growing, ministering, and equipping. Hughes' training approach provides four paths toward maturity based on the learner's time commitment.

Level I, for those with a minimal time commitment, works on growing people at a slower pace. Students are first led through the **Living Discipleship** studies (10-12 weeks) in a group setting, and then into The Student Bible studies on a group basis.

Level II, for those who commit four to five hours per week, assumes prior completion of **Living Discipleship** or the **Survival Kit for New Christians**. Learners complete a Share Seminar (relationship evangelism training) training in how to use the **Spiritual Journey Notebook (SJM)** and continue the SJN, meeting weekly with an accountability group or with personal accountability to a leader.

Level III, for those who commit seven or more hours per week, is the MasterLife training program mentioned earlier. It assumes prior completion of **Survival Kit** or **Living Discipleship**.

Level IV, again for a 7-plus hours commitment, has two parts.

The first, paralleling MasterLife, involves 24 weeks of training using a group session based on the **Patterns for Discipleship—Phase I** guide and homework that involves Bible study, Scripture memory, use of the SJN and practical application. There is a heavy stress on the leader setting goals in the areas of skills, character, and vision and a stress on the leader modeling the skills and character he wants to communicate.

The second part of Level IV involves the trainer and trainee setting goals together for study/learning in the non-sequential study series **Patterns of Discipleship—Phase II**. As in Phase I, study continues an emphasis on a personal walk with Christ through daily quiet time.

Limits. The full effectiveness of the system depends on the example/model of the Christian life set by the leaders of the ministry. If the system is treated merely as a new set of Bible studies without serious attention to exemplifying, results will be far less than the system's capability.

Strengths. There is a strong emphasis on modeling/pace-setting by the leader so that students can see an example of how to live the Christian life.

The system has extensive support materials, yet the mentality of it is not merely a content approach. The lower (but still college) reading level and the broader scope mean the system could be used as the framework of a campus discipling ministry rather than only one aspect of it.

Conclusion

The words of Christ are clear: "Make disciples . . . teaching them to **obey** . . ." (Matt. 28:19, RSV). And, the goal of Paul is clear: ". . . that we may present **every man mature** in Christ" (Col. 1:28, RSV).

To accomplish more than a shot-in-the-dark, hit-or-miss attempt at maturing believers demands sequencing of instruction. To develop character and skills requires not only giving information to learners but giving them practical help, example-setting, and some form of apprenticeship.

The different systems we have surveyed are ways to implement training beyond the informational level. Each has

its strengths and limits. One of them could help you set a direction for your own approach to presenting "every man mature".

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