

DEVELOPING YOUR DISCIPLES TO THEIR POTENTIAL

Purpose: To prepare you to facilitate the development of your disciples to their *maximum* spiritual potential.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand that God desires all Christians to develop their full potential.
2. Explain the biblical basis for growth (individually and corporately) and apply those truths to your life and ministry.
3. Identify areas of strength and giftedness in your disciple, and encourage them in these areas.
4. Identify areas of weakness in your disciple and help them develop in these areas.
5. Help your disciples make a plan to use their strengths and develop in their areas of weakness.

Key Verse: Philippians 4:9 “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Note to instructor: Share about a time when a mentor in some way encouraged you to develop – either in a weakness or a strength. Mention how it affected you. Or you could share about how you encouraged one of your disciples to develop in a weakness or strength. Mention how it affected them.

I. Growth: God’s Desire.

What do the following verses tell us about God’s intentions concerning believer’s development?

Romans 8:29 *God is devoted to conforming us to the image of His Son*

Philippians 1:6; 2:13 *God is continually working toward completing the good work He has begun in us.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24 *God’s desire is to sanctify us through and through, in our body, soul, and spirit.*

Psalms 138:8 *God will accomplish what concerns me.*

II. Growth: Biblical Basis and Personal Application.

What do the following verses say about spiritual growth and how this growth happens?

2 Peter 3:18 *We are commanded to grow.*

Ephesians 4:15, 16 *We grow as we minister to others and as others minister to us.*

Colossians 1:28, 29 *Growth is the result of our “labor” in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 *God causes growth as we make an intentional commitment to develop toward our full potential.*

Henry Blackaby says in his book Experiencing God, “When (God) teaches you the Word of God, sit before Him and respond to Him. As you pray, watch to see how He uses the Word of God to confirm in your heart a word from God. Watch what He is doing around you in circumstances. The God who is speaking to you as you pray and the God who is speaking to you in the Scriptures is the God who is working around you.”

III. The Mentor’s Role

As mentors, we have the great privilege and awesome responsibility of being used by the Holy Spirit to shape the lives of people into multiplying disciples. This responsibility is two-fold: Be a Biblical model and example that we want them to become (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 4:9); See our lives multiplied in the lives of our disciples through the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 2:2).

A. The Biblical Perspective Toward our Disciples.

1. Jesus’ perspective (John 1:40-42)
 - a. What the disciple is **now**.
 - b. What the disciple will **become**. Jesus saw their potential, in spite of present weaknesses.
 - c. Jesus expected His disciples to **follow His example** in discipling others (Matthew 4:19).
2. The apostle Paul’s perspective (2 Timothy 2:2)
His disciples were to disciple others who were to disciple others...
3. Characteristics of potential disciples.
 - a. **Faithful**. This means “full of faith” or “true to the original. Our original is Jesus. This is a key characteristic as mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:2.
 - b. **Available**. Matthew 4:19-22. This is a willingness to follow and to be used in any way needed.

- c. **Teachable.** Matthew 28:19, 20. The disciples learned from Jesus and taught others. Our disciples must be teachable and able to teach others.

B. Three Dimensions of Disciple Development.

1. Teaching – the imparting of knowledge. Cognitive.
2. Building – the imparting of character (Colossians 1:9-12). Affective. Character is who a person is. One’s daily moment by moment life will reflect it. This is more often caught than taught. Mentors need to exhibit the character of Jesus, which calls for them to walk in the Spirit and let Him live in and through them.
3. Training – the imparting of ministry skills (Luke 11:1-4). Behavioral. This is the “how to’s” of ministry. Jesus demonstrated what he would later want His disciples to do.

C. How to Develop Disciples.

1. Intercession. Pray specifically and regularly for our disciples (John 17:9). If Jesus prayed for His disciples, how much more should we. Pray for them and pray with them.
2. Demonstration. **Be** what you want them to **become.** John 13:15
Jesus demonstrated every aspect of the life He wanted His disciples to live. He showed them how to pray, serve, trust God, etc. Mentors need to be with their disciples to let them observe how mentors handle everyday life (Acts 4:13).

Our disciples can only be discipled to the level of growth that we have reached (John 13:16).

3. Instruction. Teach them the Scriptures (Luke 24:27).
4. Equipping. Provide training in ministry skills (Ephesians 4:12).
5. Shepherding. Love and care for them according to Christ’s example (John 13:34, 35; 1 Peter 5:2).
6. Leading. Provide direction and supervision (Luke 9:1-6; 10). Jesus gave clear instructions. Mentors need to give disciples clear instructions and goals.

D. Biblical Standards of Development for your Disciples.

1. Singleness of objective (Matthew 6:33). The disciple adopts, as his objective in life, the same objectives as God sets forth in Scripture. When believers seek God’s Kingdom and His righteousness first, then God assumes responsibility for meeting their needs in life.

2. Counting the cost (2 Timothy 2:3,4). The disciple is willing to pay any price to have God's will fulfilled in his life.
3. Loves the Word of God (Jeremiah 15:16; 2 Timothy 2:15). We want our disciples to be feeding themselves from God's Word. We want them to respect it, study it, learn it, and obey it.
4. Developing a servant heart (Matthew 20:25-28). This is contrary to the world system.
5. Understands the truth of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We want them to know that they are on a team with other believers all over the world, and we want them to use their gifts to edify the body.
6. Has a growing love for people (1 John 4:7,11; John 13:35). This calls for them to be involved in the lives of others.
7. Personal discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 2:4-6). All of us are in a race whether we realize it or not. The question is, how are we running?
8. Self feeder (Jeremiah 15:16).

We see that the responsibilities of a mentor are great. They are impossible to achieve apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. The mentor is to be the example of what the disciple is to become. He is an instrument of the Holy Spirit to develop the disciple in his knowledge of God, in ministry skills as well as to develop character which is being conformed to the image of Christ. In doing this, the mentor looks beyond the present state of his disciple to the disciple he can become in the future.

IV. Identify and Encourage Areas of Strength.

We can help our disciples identify their areas of strength and giftedness and encourage them in those areas.

A. Identify areas of strength and giftedness.

1. Observe their life and ministry.
2. Note other's observations of their life and ministry.
3. Ask the disciple for his thoughts on his strengths.
4. Any other ways to identify areas of strength and giftedness?

B. Encourage disciples to develop further in their areas of strength.

1. Verbally affirm and express appreciation of their strengths. Be specific and truthful.
2. Give them opportunities and appropriate roles, which will exercise and further develop their strengths.

V. Identify and Develop Areas of Weakness.

We can help our disciples identify their areas of weakness or non-development, and encourage them to develop in these more difficult areas.

A. Identify areas of weakness or non-development.

1. Observe their life and ministry.
2. Note others' observations of their life and ministry.
3. Ask the disciple for his thoughts on his weaknesses.

B. Encourage disciples to develop in these areas, toward a basic level of proficiency.

1. Pray with them about these areas.
2. Provide "low-risk" ministry opportunities for personal development.

"Low-Risk" situations require a small step of faith and are not so threatening because there is little risk of embarrassment even if he/she "fails." Simulated situations are one example of "Low-Risk" opportunities. Speaking before a large group of non-believers or even a large church could have a "high-risk" of failure.

3. Give regular, on-going verbal encouragement.

These areas of their lives may never be strengths, but they can be developed to the point where they no longer hold the disciple back from taking increasing responsibility in the ministry or from building healthy relationships.

VI. Implement a Plan

We can help our disciple to begin implementing a plan which will concentrate on developing their identified strengths and weaknesses.

- A. Help them set and achieve realistic short-term and long-term goals which will maximize their potential.
- B. Provide increasingly numerous and visible opportunities for them to exercise their strengths and develop in their weak areas.

C. Establish a system of accountability to encourage on-going progress.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you already discussed strengths and/or weaknesses with any of your disciples? Have you already helped them implement a plan to develop their strengths and/or weaknesses?
2. What strengths have you noticed in your disciples? How will you encourage them to develop further in their strengths?
3. What weaknesses have you noticed in your disciples? How will you encourage them to develop in their weak areas?
4. Are you a Biblical model of what you would like your disciples to become? In what areas do you need to trust the Lord to develop in your life to be more like Christ?
5. Do you feel your disciples are getting a good balance of teaching, building, and training (III.B.)? In what areas might you need to concentrate on more, and how will you do this?

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

As a result of your observations and others' observations of your disciple, Janice, the following strengths and weaknesses have been identified:

Strengths: 1. Great at one-to-one relationships
 2. Organized.

Weaknesses: 1. Poor public speaking.
 2. Constantly late for meetings.

A. How would you encourage Janice to maximize her strengths?

1. Verbal: *(What would you say to her?)*
Could say, "I have noticed, and others have noticed..."
2. Goal-Setting: *(What targets would you give her to shoot for?)*
Have her help in organization of an outreach – give her areas of responsibility.

Have her disciple 1-3 other women.
3. Opportunities: *(How could you provide opportunities for her?)*
Perhaps for my outreach, ask her to organize it. She can also disciple new converts.
4. Accountability: *(How will you hold her accountable in the plan?)*
Check now and then on what she needs to have done for the outreach. Find out what she's doing and how the discipleship is going.

B. How would you encourage Janice to develop in her areas of weakness?

1. Verbal:
Lateness: "I've noticed and others have commented ..."

Speaking: "How do you feel you are as a public speaker?"
2. Goal-Setting:
Lateness: discipline to leave earlier and/or plan ahead.

Speaking: See if she will speak in a small group.
3. Opportunities:
Lateness: Offer to pick her up; monitor.

Speaking: See if she will share her testimony at a small Bible study at my house.
4. Accountability: *Observe both.*