

MBC MEN'S STUDY

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

CLASS 1: DISCIPLESHIP TODAY, CHAPTERS 1-2

- **Jan 18: Current State of Discipleship & Defining Discipleship Biblically (Chs.1-2)**
- Feb 8: Principles of Biblical Discipleship Part I & II (Chs. 3-4)
- Mar 8: Key Factors in Discipleship Today & Tomorrow (Chs. 5 & 8)
- April 12: Discipleship Avenues for the Church & Personal (Chs. 6-7)
- May 17: Becoming a Mature Disciple-Maker ([GIBC Grace & Granite Notes](#))

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

- Our men's training is going to have two tracks in the Spring semester (Jan – May 2026).
- One of the tracks is designed for men to grow in their leadership with the result being someone who is a small group leader, potential elder or deacon, ministry leader, or any other leadership role in the church.
 - This has already started and the first set of class notes are on the website.
- Our current track that we are studying has a focus on discipleship in the local church.
- This is for those men who do not necessarily believe they are called or gifted for leadership in the church, but desire to disciple others in the body.
 - I believe that all men are called to lead.¹
 - Your own spiritual growth.
 - **Matthew 22:37-38** “And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.”
 - Your wife's heart.

¹ List taken from <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/4-areas-where-men-are-called-to-spiritual-leadership/>

- **Ephesians 5:23** “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”
 - Your kid’s heart.
 - **Ephesians 6:4** “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
 - Your service in the church.
 - **1 Peter 4:10** “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”
 - Even in discipleship, there is a sense of leadership as you take someone down their path with the Lord as He brings change into their lives.
- Both of these tracks, leadership and discipleship, are undergirded by the most recent semester’s men’s training we worked through *The Masculine Mandate*.
- Every man has a responsibility in their home life, their work life, their personal life, and in the church where they are members to be the man that God has called them to be.
- The *Masculine Mandate* gave a large and broad overview, both theologically and practically, of what a man of God looks like in “real life.”
- The purpose of the first semester was to introduce to you and fine tune your thoughts about biblical concepts and commands regarding what true biblical manhood looks like today.
- Regardless of your goal or path forward, every man in the church is called to be growing in Christ and being more and more conformed to His image.
- Whether you desire to better disciple yourself, disciple others in the church or sharpen your ability to disciple your family at home, we all need to know how to not just lead someone to Christ but also how to teach them all that Christ has commanded them.
- Our hope is that while you will ascertain more and more biblical truth on the topics of biblical manhood, biblical leadership, and biblical discipleship, you will then put these principles into practice.
 - **J.I. Packer:** "Knowing about him is a necessary precondition of trusting in him... but the width of our knowledge about him is no gauge of the depth of our knowledge of him."
 - **D.L. Moody:** "The Bible was not given for our information but for our transformation."
 - **Charles Spurgeon:** "Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right."

- **Thomas Watson:** "Knowledge is the eye that must direct the foot of obedience".
- **Thomas Boston:** "Whatever you learn from the word, labor to put it in practice... No wonder they get little insight into the Bible who make no conscience of practicing what they know".
- Most importantly as you learn what the Bible says, you will begin to put these truths into practice in your own lives and then teach these things to others.
- Throughout this 5-month course, we are going to challenge our beliefs which hopefully lead to a change in our practice.
- **When this course is done:**
- You should have a robust understanding of the purpose of the church with regards to discipleship.
- You will have an understanding of the current state of the church regarding discipleship and how it is and is not practiced in the local church community.
- You will have an understanding of what the Bible says a *disciple* is and what *discipleship* is.
- You will know the importance of discipleship in your own life and how your own understanding of discipleship is going to be seen in your relationships around you.
- You are going to know how to disciple, how to look at the church and your own life and evaluate the various discipleship avenues that you have available and that you are currently using.
- Since much of discipleship will center around transformation, you will also know what true, biblical, and lasting sanctification looks like in the life of the Christian.

INTRODUCTION TO “DISCIPLESHIP TODAY”

- Why this book? Why right now?
- **Listen to these two quotes:**²
- While delivering a speech in Australia, in August 2014, atheist Lawrence Krauss stated:
 - Change is always **one generation away** . . . So if we can plant the seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away—and that’s what I think we have an obligation to do.
- In 1935, Nazi Germany’s dictator, Hitler, was reported as stating:
 - He alone, who owns the youth, gains the Future!³

² https://answersingenesis.org/family/it-only-takes-one-generation/?srsltid=AfmBOorWXap2pkeG6b3LKVmP3_tP-EfJGtF9KQZiYaz7pbCoDm0QCI6R

³ (The quote was translated from German into English in 1946 during the Nuremberg trials.)

- In January 2018, Christian researcher George Barna stated that Generation Z (born between 1999–2015) is the **first truly “post-Christian” generation**. In fact, statistics show Generation Z is twice as likely to be atheist as any previous generation.⁴
- The world is coming after our youth...our children.
- “The devil has also attacked the family in the church. More attacks from within! There’s been a generational loss from the church, and now we are seeing church attendance figures for Millennials and Generation Z down to less than 9%. Much of the church has given up (compromised/ignored) the authority of God’s Word in Genesis, thus undermining the foundation of all doctrine and a biblical worldview. Much of the church is lukewarm, not raising up generations to boldly stand on God’s Word.”⁵
- Why should these statistics and truths alarm us? If our children are falling into the snares of the world, it means that we as men have also fallen prey to some degree.
- Our view of the importance of discipleship in the church and in our own lives is going to have far-reaching effects. These effects are not only in our own lives but also in the lives of those people whom the Lord has given to us.
- We must know how to take care of our own spiritual life so that we are able to take care of those around us as well.
- As we will come to see, discipleship is all about transformation. It is not so much about the transmission of information (though that’s important) it is about how that information is impacting real life.

⁴ https://answersingenesis.org/family/it-only-takes-one-generation/?srsltid=AfmBOorWXap2pkeG6b3LKVmP3_tP-EfJGtF9KQZiYaz7pbCoDm0QCI6R

⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 1: THE CURRENT STATE OF DISCIPLESHIP

- In order to fully grasp the severity of the problem, we must look at the current state of discipleship in local churches.
 - In other words, we have to set the need. If there is no need for discipleship to be studied and it is happening with biblical clarity and frequency, then there is no need to further study.
- This first chapter is similar to a health checkup from the doctor. If the church is under the authority of Jesus and Jesus commanded the church to disciple, then we should, from time to time, make sure that we are following that command.
- If discipleship is vital to the health of the church and individual believers (which we posit that it is), then we must know how the church is doing at this timeless and imperative task.
- Burggraff starts with an important question, “If you were to provide a letter grade for how well the church is discipling believers, what letter grade would you give?” **Your Answer** _____
- As he goes on to say, he usually gets somewhere around a C or D grade.
- While there are obviously exceptions, as he says, the church at large “is not doing a good job of obeying the final command that Jesus gave His followers in Matthew 28:19-20, ‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.’”
- Once again, just like a doctor’s visit, there are some *vital signs* that we need to look at within the church⁶ to get an idea of how the overall church is doing.
- This is what Burggraff does with the following headings.

Decline of a Biblical Worldview (2-3)

- Citing from recent findings, Burggraff states that 7/10 consider themselves to be a Christian, only 6% possess a biblical worldview.
- 1/5 who attend evangelical Protestant churches (21%) have a biblical worldview
- American adults holding to a biblical worldview has declined by 50% over the past 25 years
- From those people who are 18-29 years old only 2% hold to a biblical worldview
- I think that it is interesting how Arizona Christian University brought together the nation’s response to the COVID19 pandemic and a biblical worldview.

⁶ When I use the word *church*, I am talking about the individual gatherings of those who claim to be born-again and attend a local gathering at an evangelical church.

- Since the nation largely responded in “widespread hoarding, panic and hopelessness,” he sees the detrimental effects of not having a biblical worldview.
- The questions that Burggraff asks are astute and need to be answered by today’s churches. *Why is the nation experiencing a dramatic decrease of a biblical worldview? Why is the next generation abandoning a biblical mindset?* _____

Exodus of Individuals from Churches (3-5)

- According to the research, there is about 2.6 million people leaving the evangelical church every decade in America.
- We have lost about 10% of our people from our churches in the past 10 years. As he says, “that’s worth losing sleep over.”
- The group that is leaving at the most alarming rate are our young people. He quotes Diskerson,
- “This may be the most disturbing of all the trends we must face-our failure to retain our own children as disciples. Simply keeping our own kids would hold us steady with population growth. But we are not keeping our kids or holding our percentage in the population. Research indicates that more than half of those born into evangelicalism are leaving the movement in their twenties.”
- The world is pulling kids away and the church is just watching it happen; not knowing what to do.
- Obviously, this is not true of *every* church, but with the extremely high percentage of people leaving conservative churches, the vast majority of young people are leaving.
- This means the question has moved past *is there a problem* to now we need to ask *what are we going to do about the problem in front of us*.
- Why does an exodus matter from the church? As Burggraff states, “These trends indicate that a growing number of evangelicals, especially younger evangelicals, are leaving the church. This exodus reveals an area of concern as to how the church is discipling believers.”
- We want to know why there are so many people leaving the church.
- We also want to know why those who, perhaps held to a biblical worldview at one time, have abandoned it in favor of a secular one.

Lack of Bible Knowledge (5-10)

- “Bible knowledge is the byproduct of Bible reading. One cannot know the Scriptures without reading and studying the Scriptures. Sadly, studies reveal that many people who fill the pews of our churches do not read God’s Word on a regular – much less – daily basis.”
- Before we have a grasp on the purpose and place of discipleship in the church...are we reading and studying our Bibles?
- Does the Word of God have *the* prominent place in your heart and in your mind?
- Do we know and are we convinced that God’s Word is *the* primary means that is used in our life for spiritual growth?
- “In a recent survey by Life Way Research, the **No. 1 predictor of spiritual maturity among church goers was whether or not they read the Bible on a daily basis**. Yet, only 16 out of 100 of those who regularly attend our churches read the Bible every day; another 32 percent read the Bible at least once per week. This means that more than 50 percent of people who come through our doors on a regular basis only read their Bibles occasionally, perhaps one or two times per month, if at all. Even more sobering, only 37 percent of those who attend church regularly say reading and studying the Bible has made a significant difference in the way they live their lives. Only 37 percent.”
(emphasis mine)
- “Bible reading has become the religious equivalent of sound-bite journalism. When people read from the Bible, they typically open it, read a brief passage without much regard for the context, and consider the primary thought or feeling that the passage provided. If they are comfortable with it, they accept it; otherwise, they deem it interesting but irrelevant to their life, and move on. **There is shockingly little growth evident in people's understanding of the fundamental themes of the Scriptures and amazingly little interest in deepening their knowledge and application of biblical principles.**” (emphasis mine)
- These statistics are jolting...our spiritual maturity is directly linked to our Bible reading and yet those who read the Bible are few and far between. Scarier yet, perhaps, are those who read the Bible to see spiritual growth are more scarce yet.
- The question that comes to mind when I read studies like this is *why then come to church?*
- If the Bible is not seen as life giving and even reading the Bible is not seen as an important means of God’s grace...then why continue to associate with the body of Christ.

- There were some shocking truths which are fruit of a lack of Bible knowledge. (p. 8)
 - Many professing Christians cannot identify more than 2-3 disciples
 - 60% of Americans can't name 5 of the Ten Commandments
 - 82% of Americans believe "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse
 - 12% of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife
 - Too many people thought Billy Graham preached the sermon on the mount
- While some of these are comical, these are answers and responses from those who would consider themselves to be born again.
- This is from the conservative, evangelical churches who hold to many of the same doctrinal positions that we do.
- This shows that there is a direct link between the church's view of the Bible and what their members think about the Bible.
- As Albert Mohler has stated, "Christians who lack biblical knowledge are the products of churches that marginalize biblical knowledge." (p. 8 in Burggraff's book)
- This is the **link** that we must know and prioritize in our church.
 - "...biblical knowledge is a critical component in the discipleship and spiritual growth of an individual. If churches marginalize Bible knowledge, they will be filled with believers who have superficial knowledge of God's Word."
- If we don't see the link, if we prioritize other means of discipleship (which can be beneficial) over the Bible, we cannot expect to see true spiritual change and results.
- The only way we can grow spiritually and have a good biblical worldview is by being in the Bible on a consistent basis.
- We must take time to read and study what the Bible is saying, to whom it is saying it to and then to find out how we can apply that into our own lives.
- If our desire is to talk worthy of the calling which we were called, then we must know what the one who called us expects.
- Without the proper guardrails and path to follow, we are going to be left up to our own thoughts and our own desires.
- As Burggraff asks on page 10, "How can one be a true follower (disciple) of the Savior if he does not now Christ's message and instruction?"

De-Emphasis of Discipleship Training (10-12)

- Far too many churches are not putting an emphasis on discipleship or discipleship training. As he quotes James Montgomery Boice, “There is a fatal defect in the life of Christ's church...a lack of true discipleship. Discipleship means forsaking everything to follow Christ. But for many of today's supposed Christians – perhaps the majority – it is the case that while there is much talk about Christ and even much furious activity, there is actually very little following of Christ Himself.”
- Did you catch what Boice was saying? The church talks about Christ and about doing work for Christ, but it does not emphasize the importance of following Christ.
- Why is that? “To most laypeople ‘discipleship’ is a tired word.”
- To the point, on page 11, he says that after “extensive interview process with Christian adults: ‘Not one of the adults we interviewed said that their goal in life was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ or to make disciples.’”
- **If those in the church are not interested in becoming more like Christ, or participating in the process of making others like Christ...I reiterate my question from above...why are you at church?**
- Let's start to put all the pieces together:
 - The Bible is God's means of spiritual transformation in the life of a Christian
 - The church is commanded to disciple believers for their spiritual transformation
 - When the Bible is used in discipleship, spiritual transformation can then take place, the believer becomes more and more like Christ throughout the entirety of their life
 - Therefore, the Bible is essential in the life of believer
 - If the church is not using or pointing believers to the Bible, they are not going to be transformed into the image of Christ and still think and act like the world.
 - So called believers will continue to think worldly because they are not being disciplined with the Bible...thus showing a lack of transformation in their spiritual life.
- These three components are essential in the life of the Christian, the church, the Bible, and being a disciple of Jesus.
- A 2010 study is as alarming as it is true:
 - Sadly, we can make this bold diagnosis based on the far-reaching and sobering research: There is a discipleship deficiency in most churches resulting in a lack of transformation...

The sad reality is that the daily lives, aspirations, and desires of many people in our churches mirror those who do not claim to know Christ.⁷

- Men, after much research and talking with 1000's of churches and their members, there is conclusive research that shows discipleship is not just defined from a worldly perspective, it is rarely, if ever, happening in the normal process of the church.
- Discipleship is the lifeblood of the church. Jesus commanded us to make disciples by teaching them to observe all that He commanded (Matt 28:19-20).
- This is not a responsibility “for someone else...” it is intended for all who call upon the name of the Lord.

Why Should This Matter to Us?

- First, it is for our own heart check.
 - Do we know the importance of Bible reading on a regular basis? Do we know that spiritual transformation takes place through spiritual means?
- Second, these are the people that you and I are going to be interacting with, in the church and in the world.
 - You are going to have (if not already) conversations with others who claim to love God, love Jesus, but never read their Bibles.
- Third, these are the people that you are sending your kids to when they are outside of your home.
 - Are you kids ready to interact with a world that seeks to completely destroy all that the Bible teaches?

CHAPTER 2: DEFINING DISCIPLESHIP BIBLICALLY

- Now that we know the “dismal picture of the current state of discipleship take place (or not taking place) with the American churches”, we need to better understand discipleship.
- When we understand what Jesus was talking about and how He expected it to happen, we can make the necessary changes in our life and church to better follow Him.
- Burggraff writes, “OVER THE YEARS, I have been asked the question, ‘What is discipleship?’ Oftentimes the question is asked because individuals have heard various definitions of discipleship,

⁷ Quote and survey findings quoted in *Discipleship Today*, Andrew Burggraff, 12 (study found in footnote 25).

complicated characteristics of a disciple maker, numerous misconceptions as to what constitutes the discipleship process, etc. Before one can accurately discuss what discipleship should look like in our churches and lives today, a proper understanding of what discipleship is and what it was in Jesus' day is critical for the modern disciple maker.” (p. 13)

- The key areas that must be studied and learned are understanding discipleship in Jesus' day. Knowing that being a disciple is more like being a modern-day apprentice. Lastly, we must be able to define both a disciple and what discipleship is.
 - At the end of the chapter, there is a very brief overview of how the word disciple seemingly stopped being used in favor of other words.

Understanding Discipleship in Jesus' Day

- Like everything else in life, if we want to know what someone meant when they said it, we must understand the context in which it was said.
- Jesus is the one who commanded us to make disciples. This means that He had something specific in mind for the church to do.
- We can't just use the word how we want or use it in our modern-day context.
- As Burggraff point out, the Greek word μαθητής in the NT means pupil, learner, or disciple.
- This was not a new concept that Jesus was introducing to the church.
- In fact, it would have been a very common in Greek culture. It meant, “a committed follower of a great master, philosopher, or religious figure. The commitment assumed the development of a sustained relationship between the follower and the master, and the relationship extended to imitation of the conduct of the master.”
- As Burggraff then points out, “Disciples,’ then, were individuals who were committed to a master who provided the philosophy/teaching and patter of life that they could follow.” (p. 14)
- The concept of NT discipleship went well beyond the 12 Apostles, it was used for all who were following Jesus.
 - I think an important note should be added, just because the NT called someone or a group of people *disciples*, does not mean they were born again.
 - In our modern-day, I believe that many who are *Jesus followers* may not actually be born again. They may, just like those in **John 6**, simply be following Jesus for what they can get or as an example for how they should live.

- To be a disciple means to follow the teachings of Jesus (what the Bible says).
- **Mark 8:34-35** “And He [Jesus] summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.’”
- The call to discipleship is a call to die to oneself and strive to follow the commands of Christ.
- This is how Jesus understood the call in His day and how He used the word.

Disciples as Apprentices

- “Not only was a disciple a ‘learner,’ but he was also an ‘apprentice’ of a teacher.”
- Our lives should so resemble Jesus’ life that we truly are His ambassadors on earth.
- Our goal should be to continually learn from Him, be trained under Him, and be able to image Him wherever we go.
- As Burggraff states, “Imitation of the behavior of a human master became a significant feature of a disciple of a teacher. The disciple was so committed to the master that he or she wanted to imitate their conduct...most of the time, the disciple was so committed to the master that the disciple tried to emulate the overall lifestyle of the master.” (p. 17)
- This is vital when we discuss the importance of discipleship in the local church.
- It is not just about getting the right information into the person, but it is about the **person of Jesus**.
- When we are being discipled or discipling others, is there a focus on being more like Christ?
- Has the gaining of knowledge become more important than how to use the knowledge?

Defining a Disciple

- Throughout the NT, a disciple of Christ is commanded to grow in their spiritual life.
- There is an expectation that when one is born again, brought to new life, become a new creation that they are going to be transformed more into the image of Christ.
- The mind will begin to be transformed more and more into the mind of Christ.
 - **1 Corinthians 2:16** “For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.”
- This is shown as our thinking, our living, our acting and even how we respond to things changes.
- After being born again, a disciple of Jesus is one that has taken His yolk and began to follow Him.

- Burggraff helpfully defines it like think, “A disciple, then, is a *born-again believer who desires to learn what the Bible teaches, seeks to obey God’s instruction, is committed to following Christ’s example, and teaches the truths of Scripture to others.*”

Defining Discipleship

- “The term "discipleship" may be difficult at times to define. Today, it is being used as a catchall term for anything from mentorship to small-group discussion, from meetings at a coffee house to the title for a conference at a sports arena. However, it is best to understand discipleship as "a deliberate process of moving Christians forward spiritually." Wilkins highlights that "to make disciples" means to help others walk with Jesus in the real world. This includes helping others come to Christ and grow in their relationship with Christ in all areas of life. It means becoming like Christ.”
- We can think of **Colossians 1:28-29** “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”
- With this Scripture in mind, I think that Burggraff’s definition is a helpful one.
- “Discipleship, then, is *the process of learning the teachings of Scripture, internalize them to shape one’s belief system, and then acting upon them in one’s daily life.*”
- To put it succinctly, we must know the Bible, understand the Bible, and live the Bible.
- I hope that you are starting to see how important the church’s relationship with the Bible really is.
- This is why good pastors exhort their congregations to read and study the Bible. They know that no real and true growth can take place in the hearts of God’s people without God’s means.

Transition of the Term “Disciple” in the New Testament

- After using the term roughly 260 times in the Gospels and the book of Acts, the word *disciple* is never used again.
- If we are supposed to make disciples and be disciples, why would this word not appear in any of the church’s commands from Paul, Peter, John or any other NT writer.
- While we are still commanded to make disciples, there were other “images and terms” that “seem to have replaced that of disciples following a teacher or sitting at the feet of a rabbi. The terms that replace ‘disciple’ appear to be the following in addition to others:
 - Believers (Rom 10:4)

- Christians (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16)
 - Mature (Eph 4:13-15; 1 Cor 2:6)
 - Saints (1 Cor 1:2; Rom 1:7; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2; Eph 5:3-4; Rev 13:10)
- Burggraff ends the chapter with this, “Thus, though the terms and pictures used for believers transitioned away from that of disciples of a master-teacher, the core concept remained the same. These new word pictures and descriptive terms for disciples *foreshadowed the interdependence that individuals would have in their walk with Christ while still dependent upon His teaching and leading*. Also, these images *pictured a future obligation that disciples would have to one another in the church*. The implications of these new word pictures and concepts will be elaborated on in the following chapters.” (emphasis mine)

CONCLUSION

- The church is not in good shape regarding their dependence on God’s Word.
- This is seen in those who attend the church gathering and listen to their teachers on a regular basis.
- While the concept of discipleship may seem “worn out,” if believers are going to have fruitful and meaningful lives for Christ, they must have an ongoing discipleship relationship with someone and be used by God to be discipling others.
- While this is going to look different in the lives of all of us, it must still be present to some degree.
- We must hold to an unwavering commitment to Bible reading, Bible study, and gathering together with other followers, disciples, apprentices of Jesus Christ.