

## What is a disciple?

There is a lot of current discussion about discipleship. We think it is important to have a clear definition. **So, here's how we define discipleship:**



### Allow us to make some important observations:

- There are many different kinds of disciples at work in the world. One may be a dedicated disciple of a very learned professor or a particular strand of philosophy. We are focused on the particular type of discipleship characterized as being a follower of Jesus.
- Discipleship is a lifelong journey into the abundant life Jesus desires for us. It is a process of continual development through which we grow in maturity (become Christ-Centered or fully surrendered). In a culture obsessed with end results and perfection, it is crucial to remember that, for a disciple, it's the journey itself that is most important.
- Disciples are often described as 'learners,' but this is one, potentially limited, understanding of discipleship. Discipleship in the biblical tradition is not learning about Jesus, but becoming like Jesus-doing life as Jesus did life.
- The three dimensions of the life of a disciple (being part of the body of Christ, becoming more like Jesus, and joining Jesus in ministry) are broad strokes of commitment. Notice that they do not limit the options for how one may engage the body of Christ or how one grows to become like Jesus or even dictate how one must be engaged in ministry. They only point to the reality that discipleship is inclusive of all three of these dimensions of growth. Each disciple must personally discover how God has 'wired' them and is calling them to be engaged. There is no 'one size fits all' for discipleship.

The words and actions of Jesus present a clear model for making choices that lead us more deeply into being a part of the body of Christ, becoming more like Jesus, and joining Jesus in ministry. The life of a committed disciple reflects these areas of commitment:

### **In being part of the Body of Christ locally, we live a life of worship and a life of hospitality.**

- A life of worship includes participation in corporate worship as well as personal worship (e.g. devotional time) and a lifestyle of worship where every action and circumstance becomes an opportunity to give glory to God.
- A life of hospitality includes being part of the church community and welcoming new people to worship. It also includes our interpersonal relationships with and our acceptance of people who are outside the church and quite unlike us-even to the point of intentionally building relationships with people beyond the church in order to embody Christ's love.

**In becoming more like Jesus, we live a life of purposefully opening ourselves to the presence of Jesus and increasingly obeying what Jesus has taught us. Together these actions reflect Intentional Discipling.**

- A life of Opening to Jesus includes hearing sermons that teach the Scriptures, studying Scripture, and reading Scripture devotionally, but it also includes engaging in those spiritual practices that develop our awareness of the presence of God. Followers who are mature in this dimension take more and more responsibility for their own spiritual development and become less dependent upon the institution for their growth.
- A life of Obeying Jesus involves becoming more like Jesus in our actions, attitudes and responses to others. It begins with the acceptance of a relationship with Jesus and a commitment to growth as a disciple. We not only develop a Christian worldview in our daily living, but we also increasingly come to embody the example and teachings of Jesus. Jesus is Lord over all aspects of our life. Maturity in this dimension involves partnering with someone beginning the journey and helping them develop as a disciple of Jesus.

**In joining Jesus in ministry, we live a life of service and a life of generosity.**

- A life of service includes supporting the ministry of the local church with our time and energy and participating in service projects sponsored by the church, but it also includes a lifestyle investing the best of who we are in service to others.
- A life of generosity certainly includes presenting our tithes and offerings as an act of worship, but it also includes creating a lifestyle with margins that allow us to respond to the needs of others God puts in our path on a daily basis.

**Discipleship as a Journey**

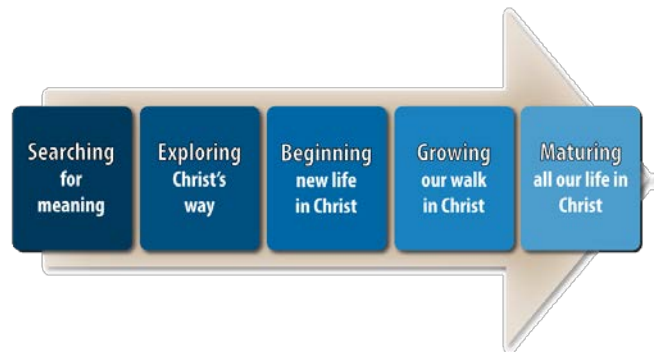
Just as all people pass through phases of development on their journey toward maturity, disciples of Jesus Christ also move through phases of development toward spiritual maturity.

The process can be visually interpreted like this:

Dimensions of Discipleship:



Phases within each Dimension:



Most people will find themselves at differing waypoints on the journey as they compare the categories. It's entirely normal to find yourself at the 'beginning' stage in one dimension and 'growing' or even 'maturing' in another. **Our hope for you is that this tool will provide insights into your unique spiritual pathway and a resource for your growth as a disciple.**