

DISCIPLING WOMEN



BY LORI JOINER



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 **PREFACE**

What a thrill to help another woman put her faith in Christ and see her grow into a godly, mature, Spirit-filled woman of God. My life has been changed for the better because of other women pouring themselves into my life — encouraging me, challenging me, pressing me forward, holding me accountable, and loving me. By God’s grace He has seen fit to allow me to have this role in other women’s lives as well.

Whether it be discipling women when I was a college student living on a dorm floor at the University of North Texas or while a staff member with Campus Crusade for Christ, from women in my church to women from the gym to women I have met while doing laundry, I love being a part of women’s lives and being available for God to use as his tool where he sees fit.

In these pages I have written about my experiences, what has worked for me, and what I have seen to be easily transferable. It is my hope that these stories and resources will help women who want to disciple other women. I tried to keep women in many stages of life in mind, but I realize that not every chapter will be useful to every woman in every situation. I do trust that most women will find some things that will

PREFACE

give them confidence to move forward to help another woman grow closer to the Lord.

It is my vision to help lead women to Christ, disciple them in God's Word, and help them grow closer to Jesus Christ — even when I am very old, perhaps living in a nursing home! I never want it to stop!

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PART I

From the Beginning

Introduction

When I arrived at Christi's home, she greeted me warmly with a big smile, and I settled onto her couch next to my best friend, Cheri. We had both signed up to be in a Bible study during our junior year of college, and this was our first meeting. The group of about ten women talked freely about the Bible lesson Christi had prepared for us while we munched on snacks she had prepared for us.

While this Bible study was a wonderful place to grow in my relationship with the Lord, the real transformation happened in my one-on-one times with Christi. To see her interactions with her children, husband, and me were wonderful, powerful models of a Christian home. I remember her telling me stories about her missionary adventures in Kenya, and I determined I wanted to go on a mission trip somewhere overseas. I told her about how I wanted to share Christ with the women on

my dorm floor, and she taught me, saying, “Lori, these are the questions college students are asking, so these are the verses you should memorize, and I will teach you an easy way to explain the gospel.” I also talked with her about my struggles with my boyfriend at the time, and she lovingly walked me through that season.

Above all, Christi invested time in me. She let me into her life, taught me the Bible, and challenged me to share what I knew with others at college and around the world. Christi made a real difference in my life, and in the lives of plenty of other women, and I longed to be that type of loving, caring person in another woman’s life.

Whether you are new to discipleship or have been discipling women for years, Part 1 will help give you some tracks to run on and perhaps some new ideas to use in your discipleship relationships. From what to talk about during discipleship times to fun things to do with your disciple, from material to teach your disciple to how to have difficult conversations with her, I desire for you to find encouragement in your discipleship endeavors.

Okay, let’s get started!

 CHAPTER 1

A Biblical Perspective on Discipleship

I greeted Samantha as she walked in the door. She'd made an appointment to meet with me during a missions conference in Florida at which I'd spoken. She was a pretty girl with curly, dark brown hair and a bright smile. We sat on my couch and began to talk about the conference, the weather, and where she was from.

As I curled my legs up on the couch, she explained to me why she wanted to see me. "I can't stop cutting myself," Samantha said, her chin quivering. "I hate it, but when I get depressed or down about how I look, I just give in again."

I could see the scars on one of her arms, about 10 thin red whelps of differing lengths. I have to say it was a struggle not to let my jaw hit the floor. Even though I'd heard of this habit before, I would've never guessed that this sweet girl who sat with me on my couch, was strug-

gling with this. We talked at length about the issue, spent time in prayer, and even shed a few tears.

“Samantha,” I advised her, “it is so important for you to talk regularly with someone in your life back home. You’ve already told me you want to grow in your relationship with God and make a difference for Him. You need to get into a discipleship relationship.”

“A what?” Samantha asked.

“A discipleship relationship,” I said again.

“What is that?”

Samantha had put her faith in Christ years before, but she had never been discipled. Even though she could rely on Christ for everything, no one had walked with her and helped her mature spiritually. After I explained what discipleship was, she was excited at the prospect of an older woman who would disciple her in her walk with God.

As she walked out the door I couldn’t help but wonder how her life might have been different had someone discipled her through the years. Perhaps if someone had taught her the lesson of Psalm 139 that she is wonderfully made by God, she would not have struggled with such low self-esteem. Perhaps if someone had taught her years ago that her body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, she never would have begun the habit of cutting herself. Perhaps if someone had taught her how to walk intimately with God, she could have gone to Him with her struggles instead of taking them out on herself. Perhaps ...

The good news is that Samantha is still relatively young. She has her whole life ahead of her. She can make it, be discipled, and begin to walk

with God in a whole new way. Unfortunately, though, the old scars will always be there.

There are thousands of Samanthas who need a woman to come alongside to love them, care for them, and encourage them in their walk with God. You and I have the ability to be that loving discipler in their lives. We don't have to have all the answers; we don't have to be the "perfect" Christian. We need only be willing to be used by God to embrace another woman in the holy endeavor of discipleship.

What is Discipleship?

Discipleship is a ministry whereby a more mature believer builds an intentional relationship with a less mature believer (relatively new to the faith, or saved but with little to no growth) for the purpose of teaching the content of the gospel and demonstrating the Christian lifestyle.

What it's not

- * Professional counseling in which a person might need medication
- * Mentorship or a Big Brother/Big Sister program- although some things may overlap
- * Pedantic dissemination of facts, which is mere academia or a transfer of knowledge
- * Evangelism
- * Picking someone up for church every Sunday

What it is

- * Intentional
- * A goal-oriented objective toward which the discipler aims. Discipler seeks to accomplish something specific in the life of another. Goals are measurable. One measure may be the evolving of the disciple into a discipler.
- * Teaching characteristics of faith such as holiness, righteousness, and eternal perspective.
- * Teaching disciplines of faith such as witnessing, tithing, and missions.
- * A spiritual endeavor of investing, teaching, and encouraging another person toward Christ and others.

More than just a weekly appointment, discipleship is a life rub-off. It's spending time together and walking through life together, because certain life lessons are more caught than taught.

For example, one day I was at a Lowe's home improvement store with Amanda, a woman I discipled. As we got our paint mixed, I began talking about Jesus to the employee attending us. We had a great conversation, and I was able to tell him that God loved him and desired a personal relationship with him. Of all the lessons I taught Amanda during our weekly discipleship time what she remembered most were the lessons she caught when we were simply following Christ together.

Why Disciple?

Old Testament

In the Old Testament, “discipleship” was at the heart of Jewish faith. It was a function of the family under the father’s leadership and, following the captivity, a function also of the synagogue. Fathers were instructed to teach their children the Law of Moses — how to honor and please the Lord, and how to follow His commandments:

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6,7; NKJV).

In instructing Aaron and his sons in their priestly duties, God said, “You must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses” (Leviticus 10:8-11, NASB).

In Jesus’ day, the family and the synagogue remained the central forum for learning and teaching the principles of the community of faith. Until the final year of His ministry, which Bible scholars call “the year of opposition,” Jesus regularly taught in the synagogues: “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom” (Luke 4:16, NIV).

New Testament

Jesus made the invitation to be a learner personal when he asked certain

What Is Unique About Women Discipling Women?

This is a difficult question to answer, since it's all I've ever known. This has been my life's work, and consequently it's a challenge for me to talk about what is unique about it. I've always had a woman discipler and only disciple women myself. However, a few things do come to mind.

First, women don't need to go out and play a sport together to feel a bond. We can feel bonded simply by sitting in a coffee shop and crying at some point in our time together. Second, the unique struggles we face — the sheer amount of time we give to food, caring for children, self-esteem, and hormone swings — all play into women's discipleship relationships. Third, we are more verbal in our makeup, and thus will talk a good deal about what we are learning, experiencing, and feeling. Talking and self-disclosure are non-negotiable.

Helpful Terms

The terms listed below will be used throughout the book. I've defined each one to help you better understand my intentions as you read.

Disciple — the learner in the relationship or the woman being disciplined. This woman is responsible for taking the things she learns and investing them into another at some point down the line. As Chris Adsit says in his excellent book *Personal Disciplemaking*, “A disciple is a person in process who is eager to learn and apply the truths that Jesus Christ teaches him, which will result in ever-deepening commitments to a Christ-like lifestyle.”

Discipler — the teacher, or the woman who is discipling another woman. As the leader in the relationship, she is responsible for loving, encouraging, and patiently walking alongside the disciple in her spiritual walk.

Discipleship Appointment — a regular time at which the disciple and discipler meet. This could perhaps be a weekly or bi-weekly appointment in a one-on-one or small-group setting. The time frame, depending on schedules, could be an hour or two and is spent in prayer, teaching, and training the disciple in basic skills such as faith sharing and discipling. This time is also used to study the Bible, hold each other accountable, and do outreach together.

Discipleship Chain — the term used to describe a scenario in which a woman is discipling a woman who in turn is discipling another woman. We see this example in 2 Timothy 2:2: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witness, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (NIV). To illustrate:

Paul > Timothy > reliable men > others

This would be a four-deep discipleship chain. One of the primary goals in discipleship is that the woman in whom you’re investing your life will turn around and invest in the life of at least one other woman as well.

Why Not?

I think there are a variety of reasons that women don’t engage in the discipleship endeavor. These include:

- * Lack of knowledge
- * Absence of a positive discipleship model
- * Time crunch
- * Feelings of inadequacy
- * Lack of eternal perspective
- * A church without a structure for discipleship relationships

My hope is that through the pages of this book, I'll be able to dismantle some of these seeming roadblocks and give you the encouragement to embrace anew the privilege of discipleship.

In Summary

Making disciples is not simply a good idea; it is a biblical mandate with which we as believers have been entrusted. We need to share our faith and make disciples of the next generation of believers. We have the help of the Holy Spirit working powerfully within us and other fellow believers beside us. Ensuring that evangelism and discipleship are not just a job (if you're in full-time vocational ministry) will ensure that ministry is an overflow of your life, not just a task to accomplish from 9 to 5 (or 9 to 9 for some of us!). Through the course of this book, we will learn to remove roadblocks to discipleship and be encouraged to begin walking alongside one another in discipleship right now!

 CHAPTER 2

The Discippler and Her Relationship with God

“When is this going to be over?” I thought to myself. I’d been meeting with Stephanie for almost an hour. I kept secretly glancing at my watch, waiting for the minutes to tick by.

It wasn’t that she was boring or that I was tired; I was simply a bit off that day. I didn’t have much to offer. I felt spiritually dry. Carrying the weight of unanswered prayers, unconfessed sin, and a burdensome schedule that had squeezed God out had led to this empty, spiritual hole in which I found myself. Yet life goes on, and today was the day I normally met Stephanie at a Chili’s restaurant for our regular discipleship time. So here we were. I was her “spiritual” leader — and yet I felt she could probably teach me more that day than I could teach her.

For various reasons, there will be times when we feel far from God or are not as in tune with His voice and leading as we would like. Over the

years I have noticed that when I feel this way, it affects my discipleship relationships as well. Feeling as if I have nothing to offer and few (if any) encouraging words is a direct result of feeling distant and discouraged in my own relationship with the Lord. Below are a few suggestions I've learned over time that may help you put your focus back on the Lord when you feel it has drifted.

Growing with God

Time with Him

Spending regular one-on-one time with the Lord is the primary way we can grow closer to Him. Just as spending time with a new friend or significant other will enable the relationship to grow deeper and more special, spending regular time with God will allow your spiritual relationship to deepen and mature.

Through the years, I've spent this time alone with God in various ways. There are many ways to spend time with God, but always be sure to include time for reading and meditating on His Word, and communicating with Him. Currently, I begin my time with God by reading the One Year Bible. As I read the different passages, I desire to learn new things about God. I also spend time looking for ways to apply what I am reading to my own life. I might read a verse that encourages me, strengthens me, or corrects an area of my life or behavior. I then spend time writing to the Lord in my journal (I have tons of these journals, all stashed in boxes under my bed). I write to Him about my feelings, things in my life for which I am thankful, and words of surrender to His plans for the day. I sometimes sing worship songs, get on my knees to pray, or memorize a verse.

In Summary

Maintaining a vital, close walk with the Lord needs to be the top priority in your life, whether you are discipling a woman or not. However, it is all the more important if you are discipling a woman. Spending time with Him on a consistent basis, and engaging in spiritual disciplines such as fasting and Scripture memory, can help deepen your love relationship with God. A good understanding of common pitfalls in our relationship with God, such as living off yesterday, not being authentic, and hidden sin in our lives, will help us guard against these things in our own lives. God wants our heart to be steadfast in love with Him. After all, it's not our good works and tons of disciples He is ultimately after — it's our heart.



CHAPTER 3

S.T.A.R.T. Discipling

While there are probably dozens of attributes one can look for in a woman to potentially disciple, five of the foundational characteristics to identify are: Spirit-filled, teachable, available, reliable, and able to transfer what she learns. We have a limited amount of time each day to dedicate to discipling women. Because of this limited time factor, we need to be careful in our discipleship choices. A helpful acronym to remember when deciding who to disciple is S.T.A.R.T. — knowing what to look for before you begin discipling someone.

Spirit-Filled

When you desire to begin discipling, it is important for you to look for a woman who is Spirit-filled, meaning she asks God to be in control of her life and direct her path step by step each day. This is a woman who wants to follow Christ and seeks to learn and grow in her relationship with Him. She displays a life surrendered to the Lordship of Christ.

She is willing to follow the voice and promptings of God when it is easy as well as when it goes against her own will.

Look for clues to this in her life. Does she pray? Has she mentioned something in her life she is struggling with and for which she is seeking God's help and direction? Has she mentioned an example in her life where she felt God was prompting her to do something that took a step of faith, and did she follow through?

Discipling a woman who is not Spirit-filled will feel like a dead end. If she does not want to follow God wholeheartedly and follow His leading in different situations, or if she senses God is wanting her to take a step of faith and she flatly refuses, you will begin to wonder why you are discipling her. The reason we disciple women is to help them look more like Christ and be able to disciple others in the future. Not being Spirit-filled blocks both goals.

Teachable

Discipling women who are teachable is another key characteristic to look for when deciding whom to disciple. You want to disciple women who are willing to be taught new things, and who are open to correction and wise counsel. If she does not have this character trait, you're going to have a tough time teaching her anything new, especially if it means some type of necessary change in her life.

To many women, discipleship sounds fun at first. It's a blessing to have another woman care about you, spend time with you, and teach you things from the Bible. But when you come across a passage that signals a need for change in her life and she is consistently resistant, it will be tough. If you notice a personality trait that needs attention, and she



PART II

Issues Women Face

Introduction

Because of the nature of discipleship relationships, we will often have a deep connection with the women we disciple. As we pray for them, encourage them, and hope for them, we will develop an ever-deepening desire to see them become all they can be in God's kingdom. So when your disciple shares with you a deep issue in her life, I want you to be equipped to know the next step to take — to know how to respond, how to help, how to point her in the right direction for healing, and how to continue to walk alongside her as her discipler, cheerleader, and friend.

When your disciple reveals a deep issue such as depression, sexual abuse, or a past abortion, you may feel inadequate to deal with such issues. I understand, as I have been there countless times throughout the years. I remember several occasions where I would meet with a woman who confided in me about a particular issue or struggle, and I would imme-

diately pray in my heart, “Oh, God, help me — give me your wisdom. I need your help ASAP.”

These next few chapters are written for just those moments. In those situations, you may find yourself with no idea what to say or do next. As you read each chapter, please keep a few things in mind.

First, it is okay not to have the answers. No one, no matter how long they have been discipling others, is equipped in every circumstance. So let yourself off the hook. You are not Superwoman, and it is perfectly fine to say, “I don’t know, but I want to help.”

Second, you and I are not professional counselors. Okay, maybe a few of those reading this book are professionals, but the majority of us are not. I say this because I don’t want you to try to be a counselor in someone else’s life. When an issue arises, you need to continue to be the discipler. That is, you can pray together, do outreach together, hang out together, have accountability, and you can teach your disciple from the Bible. But be quick to let someone else do the work of professional counselors. They are trained to understand and find root issues behind certain types of behaviors and ways of thinking, and they will know if the woman you are discipling needs medication, group therapy, or counseling.

Third, the stories in these chapters are real (as throughout the entire book). I want you to have hope for your disciple. Regardless of the problem she is dealing with, she can come through it in the power of the Holy Spirit, and even begin to help others with similar issues. So take heart and don’t be discouraged — nothing is impossible with God!

Finally, I want to let you know I am proud of you! Discipling women is a passion and a very rewarding blessing. It can also be a thankless, draining, and heartbreaking endeavor. I have experienced the gamut of emo-

tions, and I am proud of you for persevering and trusting God to work in and through you to touch the lives of others for His glory!

The American Association of Christian Counselors has an entire website dedicated to helping you find in your area the Christian counseling your disciple needs. So if you are discipling a woman you think needs a counselor, have her visit www.aacc.net, click Find a Counselor, and simply enter her zip code. She will then be given a list of counselors in her area whom she could contact to start getting the help she needs.



Daughters and Their Fathers: "Can I really trust You, Lord?"

Madison had a difficult relationship with her father. When she was a little girl, her parents divorced. Every other weekend her dad would come to their house and pick up her and her two older brothers. Her dad would then promptly drop her off at her grandmother's house and spend the rest of the weekend with her brothers fishing and hunting. All the while she would be at her grandmother's house.

The neglect of his role as her dad is obvious now, but at the time Madison could not understand why her father spent time with her brothers but not her. The hurt was deep. Her father also had a punishing type of personality, and if she did something he didn't like, he would punish her by shaming her, withholding from her emotionally and financially, and

Abortion: “I look in the mirror and think, ‘What have I done?’”

“I need to tell you something, and I am not sure how to tell you,” Noel said with tears running down her cheeks. “I had an abortion two years ago.”

“It was during my sophomore year of college,” she continued. “When I saw that pregnancy test turn positive, I was shocked. A million things went through my head at the same time. I said to myself, ‘I can’t be pregnant, I can’t tell my parents, I’m only 19, I’m not even dating the guy anymore, I don’t want anyone to know, I don’t want it.’ I was just over two months pregnant. The father of the baby paid for the abortion, after he told me I had better really be pregnant because he didn’t want to waste his money if this was all just a hoax. I wish I could go back and change things. If I knew then what I know now, I would have had