

TEACHING the
NEXT
GENERATIONS

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE
FOR TEACHING CHRISTIAN FORMATION

EDITED BY TERRY LINHART


Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Terry Linhart, ed., *Teaching the Next Generations*
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Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN: 978-0-8010-9761-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Linhart, Terry, 1964— editor.

Title: Teaching the next generations : a comprehensive guide for teaching Christian formation / edited by Terry Linhart.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016016461 | ISBN 9780801097614 (paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Spiritual formation. | Christian life—Study and teaching. | Christian education.

Classification: LCC BV4511 .T43 2016 | DDC 268—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016016461>

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16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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In memory of Dr. Eugene Carpenter (1943–2012)
Old Testament scholar, mentor, colleague,
and dearly missed friend
—Terry Linhart

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Acknowledgments

This book is a credit to my colleagues who have given of their time and expertise to write its chapters. These scholars and leaders are model teachers, and their friendship and graciousness have made this a delightful process.

A very special thanks to Bob Hosack and the staff of Baker Academic, who have provided the very best advice and input, wrapped in patience and kindness, at every step along the way. Eric Salo provided flawless editorial oversight and wise counsel, while Rachel Klompmaker managed the project with grace. The Baker team has been delightful, and those of us who lead and teach in this field are grateful to Baker Publishing for its consistent leadership and support of Christian ministry and higher education.

I am especially indebted to Melisa Blok for her editorial assistance and advice throughout the entire project. Mahala Rethlake provided her usual proficiency in formatting and editing. These two have bright futures ahead of them in writing and publishing.

Thanks to Ginny Olson, Jon Swanson, Mark Cannister, Jim Hampton, David McCabe, Sharon Ketcham, and Cristian Mihut for their guidance and input. With each book project I complete, I am more amazed and thankful for Mark Root of Bethel College's Bowen Library for his reference expertise and his ability to obtain any book, dissertation, or journal article in record time. This project would not have been possible without the support of my fellow faculty members and the administration at Bethel College (Indiana), a vibrant, Christian learning community.

Finally, thanks to Jessica Baylis, Alissa Bremer, Crystal Cruz, Cole Farlow, Aaron Grosse, Tim Horton, Devin Hubbard, Ethan Klein, Calli McGrath, Phillip Parry, and Lindsay Ziegler for being the “pilot class” for this book.

This project would not be possible without the supportive communities of the Society of Professors in Christian Education (<http://www.spceonline.org>) and the Association of Youth Ministry Educators (<http://www.aymeducators.org>). Each of these organizations nurtures, supports, and champions Christian education, including youth and children’s ministry, as a focus of study in Christian colleges and seminaries across North America.

Introduction

Any casual observation of young children reveals that people are naturally created by God to grow and learn. The world of the child is a natural place of inquisitiveness, discovery, and wonder, marked by questions of “why?” and “how?” and “why?” again . . . and again. Learning is at the forefront of each day’s activity.

Somewhere along the way to adulthood, it seems that curiosity and a desire to learn take the backseat to other pursuits. Adolescents can describe school as “boring” or irrelevant, and newspaper headlines question the value of college education based on rising cost and potential earnings. Other critics suggest that consumerism and a media-saturated world full of bite-sized information and search engine expediency produce less-intelligent generations.¹ The most common question, “Is there Wi-Fi?” shows the role that technology now plays in how we all learn and interact with our world.

Perhaps we still are curious and really do want to learn.

It is into the dynamic and fluid context of young people that Christian teachers step, charged with ministering to the next generations and helping them grow in spiritual maturity and in wisdom and understanding of the Christian faith (Rom. 12:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Rather than throwing up their hands in despair at changes and challenges, committed Christian workers strive toward greater understanding of the teaching dynamic and its role in Christian spiritual formation. Rather than settle for what is minimum

1. For instance, Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)* (New York: Tarcher, 2009).

or average, skilled teachers work to discover greater levels of effectiveness in engaging the next generations of learners.

The church needs good teachers more than ever, teachers who

- understand spiritual formation,
- know how learning takes place for all ages,
- can employ insights from important theologies and theories,
- possess a ready repertoire of creative methods,
- are committed to prayer, and
- have a history of seeing the Holy Spirit use their teaching for spiritual transformation.

The truth is that young people are still wired to learn. They do wonder about important questions, and they still engage in what is meaningful and relevant. Perhaps part of the problem today is not with the learners but is on the side of the teaching. It certainly feels like at no other time in recent history has it been as important for Christian teaching to be effective, engaging, and of excellent quality.

Teaching for Spiritual Growth

The Christian teacher works to see spiritual growth in the lives of those he or she teaches. He wants others to know Jesus (Phil. 3:10) through salvation (Rom. 10:9–10) and develop a love for God (Luke 10:27; John 14:15–23) and an understanding of his Word (Ps. 1:1–3; 1 John 2:5). She wants to see students translate trusting faith and belief into loving action toward others (Matt. 5:43–48; John 3:34) with mercy and grace that transcends and overcomes social divisions. Christian teaching participates in God’s work by helping learners grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and with others.²

Perry Downs defines the goal of Christian teaching as “the ministry of bringing the believer to maturity in Jesus Christ.”³ This helpful definition is worth a closer look.

Maturity. The parallels between developmental and spiritual growth were obvious to the New Testament writers (1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:11–14; Heb.

2. This is taken from Luke 2:52, a description of Jesus’s growth between the ages of twelve and thirty. It has been used by Youth for Christ USA to form the “balanced life concept” for their Campus Life teaching curriculum.

3. Perry G. Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 16.

5:12–14). In the same way that a person grows physically, faith grows from greater experience, challenge, conviction, and understanding. In ministry settings, understanding gets less focus as a goal than the first three. Yet Paul knew of the role that it played: “We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9–10). If understanding is important to maturity, then teaching is an important emphasis within Christian ministry.

In Christ. It is through Christ’s presence that we are empowered to participate in a teaching ministry so that others may be transformed by his power. Believers participate in a new reality in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) through the formation (nurture) of faith based on truth (knowledge) (Rom. 12:1–2), a truth centered on Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). The transformation through the Holy Spirit produces the virtues and fruit (Gal. 5:22–25) that reflect Christ’s presence in our lives.⁴

The ministry of bringing. Christian teaching is not reduced to mere transfer of information; it plays a vital role in bringing to spiritual maturity. Christian teaching is part of the discipling process, an essential response to Christ’s commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Teaching, then, is part of our ultimate purpose: to make disciples.

However, just because teaching is happening doesn’t mean that learning, especially a “bringing to maturity,” follows. The writer of Hebrews acknowledged as much, challenging readers to “move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity” (Heb. 6:1 NIV). It’s a bit startling to think that we can be teaching, even about Christian topics, and not be serving our learners’ growth at all. Teaching in a way so that we “bring” people to spiritual maturity in Christ seems to demand something from those who teach. This book intends to help readers faithfully fulfill those requirements and teach in ways where they regularly bring believers to maturity in Jesus Christ.

Our Challenge

We stand here in a new century with a significant challenge before us. Recent research suggests that the church is losing young adults, even those who “grew up” in the church. David Kinnaman says young adults leave in

4. There are quite a few lists of virtues in the New Testament: Rom. 12:9–21; 13:8–14; Eph. 4:25–5:10; Col. 3:1–17; 1 Thess. 5:12–22; 1 Tim. 3:13–4:4; and 2 Pet. 1:5–7.

part because the church has failed to help them think about and answer difficult questions.⁵ Similarly, the largest study on the religiosity of youth in America showed that church teens were surprisingly inarticulate about their faith. When researchers posed questions about what they believed, young people said it was the first time that an adult had asked them about their beliefs, and they seemed unable to answer basic questions about the central doctrines of the Christian faith.⁶ Though there is a lot of teaching in the church, could it be that there is not as much learning?

We need to revitalize the task of teaching the next generations, but not with default, “the way we’ve always done it” approaches or with an “anything goes” pragmatic recklessness that misses the mark in helping students grow in maturity. The next generation needs teachers—*engaging* teachers, *wise* teachers, *joyful* teachers, and *well-studied* teachers. Young people need to be engaged deeply in relevant ways beyond elementary teachings. They need a “thought-full” faith rooted in Scripture, empowered by the Spirit, and connected to everyday realities to face contemporary challenges, historical tensions, and the difficult questions.

This Book

This text champions the cause and goals of Christian teaching in ministry to young people and provides an introduction to teaching in all sorts of ministry contexts. The first section of the book explores core concepts that explain the focus and purpose of Christian teaching. The second section presents forces that give shape to teaching and learning contexts. It is critical for the Christian teacher to have a ready understanding of how developmental, social, mental, and cultural dynamics affect spiritual growth. The third section builds on the previous chapters and makes application to curricular theory as it relates to ministry across the earlier years of life. Given the current discussions and concerns, extra attention has been given to family and intergenerational ministry.

The fourth section helps readers grow in their methodological expertise and skills. Teaching the Bible, discussing in a group, and speaking in front of a large group are primary to most ministries. However, effective teaching and learning are not reserved to formal teaching times given the active and

5. David Kinnaman. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

6. Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

hyper-connected lives of today's young people. Trips, small groups, camps and retreats, and one-on-one conversations have been shown to be among the most effective forms of Christian ministry. This book uses simulation games and outdoor learning as just two examples of creative teaching methods.

The book concludes with three chapters on often-ignored topics that are essential to effectiveness. The first chapter in this section discusses evaluation—of our own teaching and of students' learning—as fundamental to our ongoing teaching success. The second chapter focuses on developing volunteers as teachers, a common task that often proves difficult. The final chapter provides teachers with numerous technological tools that offer enormous creative and dynamic opportunities for Christian teachers.⁷

I am thankful that you are joining us on the journey to be the best teacher you can be, one whom God uses to lead others to faith in Christ, to see them grow in spiritual maturity, and then to watch as they go out and do the same because they are well prepared in mind, heart, and practice. May God bless you as you read, study, learn, and grow. Let's get started!

Terry Linhart

7. In the coming years, perhaps someone will pioneer an effective and engaging, technologically aided learning environment.

The graphic features the text 'SECTION ONE' in a white, sans-serif font. The word 'SECTION' is positioned above 'ONE'. The 'O' in 'ONE' is a double-lined circle. The text is centered within a composition of three overlapping, semi-transparent light gray circles that create a Venn diagram-like effect.

SECTION ONE

CORE CONCEPTS

Anytime we teach, there is an implicit understanding at work about teaching's function and purpose. This first section highlights the theological, biblical, and philosophical purposes that undergird Christian teaching. The effective Christian teacher is conscious of the goals and strategies of teaching, and the reasons for them. In an information-driven age, regularly described as postmodern or pluralistic, the importance of clarity on these topics is as acute as ever. Christian teaching can otherwise lose its focus, misunderstand its purpose, and fail to serve the next generation's spiritual growth.

These six chapters are starting points toward a clear philosophy of Christian education, toward a biblical basis for our work as Christian teachers, and toward faithful participation in the mission that Christ has given to the church. Each chapter acts as an introduction to its given topic, with additional resources provided at the end of each chapter for those who want to go deeper.

The section concludes with a unique chapter about discovering a middle way between existing cultural and philosophical tensions that shape our teaching. The story contained in this chapter, meant to be read in full, uses two extreme examples to stimulate our critical thinking and to create greater clarity about our role and goal as Christian teachers.

The Contribution of Teaching to Discipleship

ALLEN JACKSON

People come to faith in Christ through a wide range of means. One person can come to faith simply because a church bus picked him up as a child in his neighborhood, and another by listening to a person speaking on a sidewalk. Many come to faith because of the intentional conversation of a friend or family member, while others do so through a group program at a church, camp, or conference. The moment of salvation begins a new journey of spiritual growth, a pathway toward spiritual maturity that needs teachers along its way to help, inform, and guide.

This pathway (or process) is called discipleship, a “lifelong journey of obedience to Christ which transforms a person’s values and behavior, and results in ministry to one’s home, church, and in the world.”¹ Dallas Willard says that discipleship is a form of spiritual formation, “the process of shaping our spirit and giving it definite character. It means the formation of our spirit is in conformity with the Spirit of Christ.”² It is alongside this pathway and process that Christian teaching plays its role, a forming and shaping

1. Barry Sneed and Roy Edgemon, *Transformational Discipleship* (Nashville: LifeWay, 1999), 3.

2. Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 53.



Perhaps our greatest lessons of discipleship happen through informal interactions rather than a formal program. I remember learning to hang sheet rock on a mission trip with a youth group. The man who was supervising my team owned a drywall company, and he had agreed to try to mold a group of teenagers into expert hangers, floaters, and tapers. I am still okay at drywall, but I remember distinctly forming my theology of worship on that trip. I remember him talking about why he dressed up for church and how he paused before entering the worship space at our church to prepare for worship by clearing his mind and confessing his sins. I remember him telling me to think carefully about each lyric of each song that I would sing so that my words of worship would not be empty.

process focused on the nature and direction of a person's transformational journey with the Triune God.

Teaching is part of a collective discipleship process, a combination of relationships, formal events, intentional conversations, and personal disciplines (i.e., prayer, Bible study, and reflection). Perry Downs says that Christian education “begins where evangelism ends, helping believers grow in their faith.”³ Spiritual growth, though, requires more than a transfer of information; it is measured in development toward Christlikeness, a process where the formal and informal lessons intersect and fuel believers to keep moving toward maturity.⁴

Good teaching is rarely disconnected from a strong relationship between teacher and listener. This support of growth is a different educational focus than just teaching “stuff.” The goal is the maturation of the students, and that requires diverse approaches to teaching methods and objectives. Most can recall very few of the specific lessons they heard in youth group, church, or similar programs. They were important lessons in the moment. Occasionally we may recall a key story or bullet point, but most teaching that contributes to maturity is tied to the relationships that surround it.

Before we discuss teaching, learning theories, and techniques, we have to establish the discipleship roots for the method and practice of Christian teaching. We cannot undervalue teaching's role in discipleship, as if spiritual growth requires no outside input or guidance. Neither can we overvalue

3. Perry G. Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 16.

4. Nick Taylor, “Spiritual Formation: Nurturing Spiritual Vitality,” in *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 91.

teaching, equating spiritual maturity with knowledge or something we create versus a work of God within. When we take a balanced approach to teaching's role in league with the work of the Holy Spirit, then we are able to better see how teaching plays a part in that maturation process.

As you read this chapter, reflect on these questions:

1. What part has teaching played in your spiritual growth over the last ten years?
2. If you were asked how discipleship and teaching worked together, what would your answer be?
3. What part did teaching play in Jesus's discipling ministry?
4. In the context of teaching and discipleship, what do you think is more important: good content or good process? What are the pros/cons of that position?

While it is a false distinction to try to identify which relational activities are teaching and which are discipling, *a discipler is a teacher, and a Christian teacher is a discipler*. Jesus's ministry exhibited the way teaching and discipleship are indistinguishable from each other. Jesus was often called teacher (John 13:13) or something similar.⁵ Even the Jewish authorities viewed his ministry as that of a teacher (Matt. 8:19). Though teaching was a significant part of his ministry, the relationships he had with his followers provided the "living model" for his message. Formal moments of teaching, combined with the informal life together, produced a group of disciples who were "fully trained" (Luke 6:40–41) to carry on Christ's commission.

We often think of teaching taking place in a room that feels like a classroom, which makes us think about school. Imagine what a scene from the Bible may have looked like if that was taken to an extreme:

Then Jesus took His disciples up to the mountain,
and gathering them around Him, He taught them saying:
"Blessed are the meek
Blessed are they that mourn
Blessed are the merciful
Blessed are they who thirst for justice
Blessed are you when persecuted
Blessed are you when you suffer
Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in Heaven!"

5. See, e.g., John the Baptist in Mark 9:38–39, Simon Peter in Luke 7:40–41, and Nicodemus in John 3:2.

Then Simon Peter said, “Do we have to write this down?”
 And Andrew said, “Are we supposed to know this?”
 And James said, “Will we have a test on this?”
 And Philip said, “I don’t have any paper.”
 And Bartholomew said, “Do we have to turn this in?”
 And John said, “The other disciples didn’t have to learn this!”
 And Matthew said, “When do we get out of here?”
 And Judas said, “What does this have to do with real life?”
 Then one of the Pharisees present asked to see Jesus’ lesson plans
 and inquired of Jesus, “Where are your terminal objectives in the
 cognitive domain?”
 And Jesus wept.⁶

“Equipping by its very nature is not just teaching skills but holistically growing people up in Christ’s way of living and loving so that the whole body ends up increasing in maturity in him.”

—Julie A. Gorman, *Community That Is Christian*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 17.

The humor of the story is clear to us now; Jesus was trying to make disciples through teaching eternity-altering truth. The disciples in the story missed it because they had established patterns of just getting by with right answers or being fearful of a test, while Jesus was teaching to shape their lives and equip them for a mission.

A Holistic Discipleship

Author James Stewart identifies five principles from Jesus’s ministry that can guide our own teaching.

1. Jesus’s teaching was authoritative (Mark 1:27). His teaching was authenticated by his life and his words. His example and his content were not suspect or shallow but gave credibility to his message.
2. Jesus’s teaching was not authoritarian (John 6:60–69). He did not impose or force his message on his hearers but plainly presented the costs of discipleship, encouraged those who listened to respond, and then allowed individuals to confront the truth.
3. Jesus’s teaching encouraged people to think (Matt. 16:13–15). The use of parables and questions did not provide easy answers or require rote

6. “The *Other* Sermon on the Mount,” <http://webserv.jcu.edu/bible/Humor/MountSermon.htm>. I first saw this in Peter L. Stenke’s book, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Guilford, CT: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). Most youth teachers will recognize some of their students somewhere in the parable!

responses. Jesus encouraged his followers to think for themselves and respond after carefully considering the truth.

4. Jesus lived what he taught (John 8:46). Jesus demonstrated how he wanted his disciples to live, serve (John 13), and love (John 17) others. The “exemplary” approach to Jesus’s teaching supported his content in such a way that the disciples saw what he meant and could readily follow that example in their ministry.
5. Jesus had a love for those he taught (John 15:12). This was made clear in his presence with the disciples and his relationship with them.⁷

It is easy to read quickly over Stewart’s five principles and assume that we understand them. If you look them over again and think about teachers who have struggled with them, it becomes clear that these are not automatic. In fact, if we are honest, one or two of them might be principles that we need to work on.

When an educated young man (a lawyer or teacher of the law) approached Jesus and asked him about eternal life, Jesus referred to the law.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10:25–28)

Jesus’s response reflects a holistic understanding of learning. You should love God in the cognitive domain (your mind), the affective domain (your heart and soul), and the psychomotor domain (your strength). A discipler is interested in learning of the head, the heart, and the hands, illustrating the three learning domains. So, for instance, when we memorize Scripture (cognitive), it can lead to a deeper appreciation for the richness of the text (affective), which then leads to a more confident willingness to obey (psychomotor) what the Scripture teaches. Whether these learning objectives were intentional or incidental, they still lead to a mature faith.⁸

If the goal of teaching for discipleship is to present some “mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28–29), then our teaching should shape a maturity that is reflected in what students think, feel, and do. We want our students to think and not just know. As we teach, we want them to move beyond words to discover the meaning behind the words. We want them to have more

7. James Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 64–71.

8. There are other examples of Christian discipleship and teaching; this is just one. Some believers have disabilities that make memorizing Scripture difficult.

than a “bumper sticker” theology where they can say short catch phrases but can’t explain what they mean with any structure or connection to the Christian faith.

To that end, Dr. Rick Yount says that teachers need to do the following.

- *Emphasize concepts more than words.* We often use words or phrases and assume that our students know what they mean, and many words in Scripture can have several meanings. Teaching for meaning helps students to think and study on their own, an important skill in discipleship.
- *Ask more questions and give fewer answers.* Students are invested when they have to answer a question, and they often develop some additional questions of their own.
- *Pose problems in our teaching versus giving reasons.* Problem-posing creates tension that leads to strength in thinking and conviction. It also inoculates against dependency.
- *Give examples versus facts.* There is no better way to connect deep truth to contemporary realities than by using examples, stories, and illustrations.⁹

Perhaps a helpful word instead of *teaching* is *preparing*. We often hear the word *equip*, but teaching to equip others sometimes looks no different from content-only approaches to teaching. And at the end of the process, the students aren’t ready to do much of anything. Being prepared means that we’re poised, ready, trained, and capable. So what is needed then for our students to be prepared as disciples? What does that require of how we teach?

Why Do We Teach?

Why do we teach the next generations? In ideal situations, a father or mother would answer that in various ways.¹⁰ Parents teach their children to prepare them for the coming time when the children will be making decisions on their own. Parents teach because they are compelled by love for their sons and daughters, and they have a sense of urgency to share what they know about some task or challenge their children face. Most parents want to see

9. Adapted from William R. Yount, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 197–99.

10. Not all have loving parents who are present, and not all parents have children who heed their parents’ instruction or example.

their children grow from an infant to a mature adult, a transformation that takes time, endurance, and intentionality.

With similar values, we teach the next generation. If we are living authentic lives as disciples of Jesus, then we have something we *must* share; and we do so because we love others. We share content (i.e., kingdom principles) through process (relationships combined with intentional conversation) in a (hopefully) natural way. Teaching is so natural in the disciple-making process that the intentionality of Jesus's interactions with the disciples (the Twelve and others) is overwhelming. For his curriculum, he utilized setting (have you caught any fish?), props (like a fig tree), local knowledge (will you give me a drink of water?), and traditions (you have heard it said). For Jesus as a teacher, *discipleship*—life in relationship with the Twelve and others—was the curriculum of the kingdom.

The apostle Paul was a teacher who understood the importance of presence, relationship, and example. Paul repeatedly invites believers to follow his example as he follows Christ (1 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7–9; Titus 2:7). He reminded the Thessalonians of his demeanor and example, not being vain or deceitful but rather taking a gentle and patient posture (1 Thess. 2). Perhaps Paul's encouragement to Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2 NIV), serves as a strong example for how relationship and discipling are interwoven. There are four groups of disciples in this verse: Paul, Timothy, reliable people,¹¹ and others. Paul taught Timothy, who is asked to repeat and teach reliable people who will in turn do the same with others. Disciples are replicated through teaching and influence.

A caution might be in order when considering the discipleship relationship and such intentional teaching. According to theologian Andrew Root, if we are in relationship with students so that we might teach them or influence them, we are at risk of being disingenuous. Commenting on the ministry he had with neighborhood adolescents in Los Angeles, he says,

I had to be honest with myself: I was trying to influence them. I was trying to get them to accept, know, trust, believe, or participate in something, believing it was best for them, believing it would fix them. But my desire to influence them was keeping me from really *being with them*—in a truly relational way. As my wife had reminded me, true relationships set their own terms for interaction (rather than being defined by one person's agenda).¹²

11. English translations vary here, but the Greek word *antr poi* refers to both men and women.

12. Andrew Root, *Relationships Unfiltered* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2009), 17.

As a discipler, Jesus was primarily in relationship with the Twelve. He poured his life into them, walked with them, and without a doubt influenced them. However, one of the Twelve was not on board with Jesus's kingdom vision at all. Yet during the last meal that the disciples shared before the crucifixion, Jesus washed Judas's feet. The relationship and ministry were not contingent on grasping the point of Jesus's teaching or even obeying it, though almost all did so eventually. The relationship was integral to the teaching and discipleship, and often whatever happened in the relationship was important to the teaching.

Discipleship Models

There is no shortage of materials and resources on the topic of discipleship, and yet there isn't clarity or consensus on what discipleship is. Each church or ministry operates with its own understanding of the biblical text. Author Michael Wilkins has identified five prominent models that shape how discipleship is understood today.¹³

Disciples are learners. The Greek word for "disciple," *mathētēs*, comes from the verb *to learn* and was used to describe "one who puts himself/herself under the teaching authority of a great teacher though it has no reference to whether or not the person is a Christian."¹⁴ The use of the term in Scripture seems to mean more than a learner, though, and includes a posture of following and personal devotion (e.g., Acts 11:26).

Disciples are committed believers. This view sees discipleship as a step taken after salvation. This model looks at Jesus's challenge to "count the cost" and focuses on those who left all to follow Jesus in comparison to the crowds and "ordinary" believers.¹⁵ This model is commonly used today but also has some problems. First, when Jesus invites others to count the cost, is it a call to salvation or to a deeper commitment (see Matt. 19:16–22 and Luke 14:25–33)? Second, assuming this model implies that there are less mature Christians and more committed Christians, it is difficult to give biblical support for a "two-class system" of Christians.¹⁶

Disciples are ministers. This model sees the disciples as those whom Jesus called to ministry, and so they are the ones called to serve others in

13. Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 26–33.

14. *Ibid.*, 26.

15. *Ibid.*, 28.

16. *Ibid.*, 29.

ministry and missions. This model is prominent in church traditions that make a strong distinction between clergy (pastors) and laity and have a strong hierarchical structure. Wilkins says that this model has problems in that it too creates a two-tiered structure and is difficult to support with the use of “disciples” and other words in the New Testament.

Disciples are converts; discipleship comes later. This model separates salvation from discipleship. To “make disciples” means to make converts, and then discipleship is something that begins later. The problem is that the disciple-making commission also included “baptizing” and “teaching” in its command. Wilkins asks if it’s even possible to be a disciple without being involved in discipleship.

Disciples are converts who are in the process of discipleship. This model sees discipleship not as an optional second step but as what it means to be a Christian. As Jesus called others to him, he also sent people out to make other disciples, meaning, “Growth in discipleship was the natural result of the new disciple’s life.”¹⁷ This is a widely held view of discipleship, though the emphasis can vary among such things as a personal commitment, a disciple’s impact on society, growth within the community of believers, or a focus on missional ministry.

Perhaps the best way to start unpacking how we think about discipleship is to finish this sentence: *If someone is a true disciple of Jesus, then he or she . . .* How we respond to this prompt is telling about how we think of discipleship and how we present its essence to others. This is especially true when we teach young people. We are quick to reduce complexities into short phrases so that they can be understood. When we do that, we may inadvertently be presenting a form of discipleship that may not be faithful to Scripture or that offers only a partial view.

Wilkins defines a disciple as “one who has come to Jesus for eternal life, has claimed Jesus as Savior and God, and has embarked upon the life of following Jesus.”¹⁸ In the book of Acts, the word *disciple* is synonymous with those who are believers (Acts 4:32; 6:7; 9:26; 11:26). Wilkins adds that the form is usually plural, showing that individual believers are seen as linked to a community of disciples. Therefore, when we talk about Christian discipleship, it is about what it means to grow as a Christian in all areas of life: “Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human

What model best characterizes the one you heard in church? Which one resonates with you as you understand discipleship? Why do you hold that view?

17. Ibid., 32.

18. Ibid., 40.

life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image.”¹⁹

There are at least two ways that teaching interacts with discipleship. First, teaching informs discipleship. During an unusually intense teaching time, Jesus apparently felt the urgency to teach about discipleship as he contemplated the difficult road ahead of him. Luke 9:51 tells us that Jesus focused on Jerusalem where crucifixion, burial, and ascension would take place. Luke tells three consecutive stories where Jesus taught about the requirements of discipleship. Each time the word *follow* is used to invite persons to become disciples of Jesus. In the first story, a man promised to follow Jesus wherever he went (Luke 9:57). In the second story, a man promised to become a disciple as soon as he said good-bye to his family (Luke 9:59). In the third story a man told Jesus, “Lord, I will follow you as soon as my father dies and I settle his estate.” Jesus introduced this section with a lesson on discipleship and commitment: “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it’” (Luke 9:23–24).

These three stories demonstrate a few of the typical responses to teaching *about* discipleship. Jesus instructed about the commitment necessary to be a disciple. Teaching informs discipleship.

Teaching also organizes discipleship. The apostle Paul expected discipleship to be replicated from generation to generation. The process is described in 2 Timothy 3:14–17 (NIV):

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When a disciple is taught in the context of a relationship that is not agenda driven but one that has a love motivation, like a parent to a son or daughter, the lessons move down from the head to the heart, from “learned” to “convinced of.” The disciple is aware of his teachers—in Timothy’s case, Paul referred to Timothy’s mother, grandmother, and to himself. Teaching truths from Scripture gives the disciple wisdom that points to faith, and the text is trustworthy for the development of the disciple.

19. Ibid., 42.

Questions and Activities

1. What common misconception about teaching and Christian education is the author attempting to address?
2. Do a search for how a group or denomination you are familiar with defines or describes discipleship. How does its definition seem to affect its approach to teaching?
3. When you teach, do you emphasize thinking, feeling, or doing? How can you become more holistic in your teaching and support the other areas?
4. What was the content of Jesus's teaching? What role did theological content play in his discipleship and teaching?
5. Write three examples (from your life or from others you know) that show why teachers need to balance content and relationship with regard to discipleship.

Further Reading

Mulholland, Robert M. *Invitation to a Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.

Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.

Wilkins, Michael. *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.