

CLEAR STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

By Bob Young

The church must make clear the paths of evangelism and discipleship. Every member must know well the process; every new member must be guided down these paths.

In another article I wrote about a five-step process that I used in my ministry to integrate a person into the work and worship of the local church, culminating in commitment to Christ and the body of Christ. Here is a brief overview of that process. The goal is always to bring people into the process and move them ever closer to belief, obedience and discipleship.

E-5 A person becomes someone one knows, friendship or acquaintance is developed, contact data is shared, and the person is seen as open to and interested in spiritual matters and church activities. Efforts are made to develop and evaluate belief. Contact is maintained with such people regularly and invitations are extended to those church activities that are considered of interest. Such invitations are supported by offers to help the person attend. The goal is to move the person closer.

E-4 The person, of their own initiative, attends a church activity, study, small group, or worship assembly. Efforts continue to develop belief.

E-3 The person agrees to a personal Bible study to develop belief/faith, and to understand what it means to be a Christ-follower. (Several good tools are available for this study. I personally use "Quest for Truth" which provides about two months of study.) Ideally, this study continues over an extended time, the person becomes more and more involved by attendance at activities, meets additional Christians, and is begins to become assimilated into the body of Christ.

E-2 The person makes a commitment to Christ and the local body. For unbaptized believers, this occurs at baptism, as in Matthew 28:19-20. Disciples are made by baptizing them and continuing to teach them.

E-1 The person continues to receive instruction, to observe all things Jesus has commanded. This is a continuation of the process described in Matthew 28:19-20. The continued studies are often done by the evangelist. But this is also the time that the evangelist gently passes the person off to the church or specific persons charged with discipling (elders, small group leaders, discipleship groups, etc.)

Just as the evangelism process must be clear, organized, and manageable to obtain best results and be successful, the process and expectation of discipleship must be understood in each local church setting.

D-1 This level is a natural extension of E-1. A person who arrives at E-1, completing the process of evangelism is passed to level D-1 as discipleship training begins in earnest. The primary difference is that the evangelist is replaced by the discipling group as the primary contact in the church. This level involves continued teaching, commitment, and active continuing participation. The new disciple must be taught to obey all that Christ has commanded. This includes doctrinal teaching, encouragement in holy living, and understanding the commitment required of those who would be disciples. This is the time to establish commitments. At this level, the person must be helped to understand the necessity of attending the weekly gathering of the saints to hear God's Word and be encouraged by worship and fellowship with other believers. Ideally, the person is also incorporated into one or more small groups. At this level, it is normal for another Christian to walk alongside the new disciple in almost all activities. This is a time of **"telling"** what Christianity looks like.

D-2 This level represents continuing steps in growth as a disciple. The activities in D-1 continue, but it is essential that new disciples be helped toward spiritual maturity by understanding their gifts, by equipping, and in preparation to be involved in ministry to others, especially in sharing the good news with others. I describe this step as the move to **"showing"** what Christianity looks like.

D-3 The disciple, especially the new disciple, must be helped to live out and practice what is known and understood. This involves continued training, involvement in internal service, accepting leadership roles as appropriate, and finding one's place in the evangelism efforts of the local body of Christ. The new disciple can function much of the time with minimal help, but there is always someone ready to help. This is the **"mentoring"** step where new disciples are helped to function on their own with some oversight and guidance.

D-4 The disciple completes training, is actively involved in the body of Christ, is working and serving as a maturing Christian. The new disciple is empowered and needs minimal oversight. In churches with well-defined and well-organized small group structures, such disciples are ready to gather friends and family in new small groups.

D-5 The disciple is using his or her gifts, participating as part of the body, developing other disciples—making disciples by baptizing and teaching. This is the fully-involved Christian who shares in the edification of the body and the unity of the faith by knowing the Son of God and maturing into Christ's likeness.