



## Discipleship in Three Dimensions: Implications for Home, School and Church as Learning Institutions

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**Abstract:** *This article intended to explore the three mentoring aspects as discipleship dimensions within the three Training avenues, attempting to show the significance of each one. Literary method was engaged in this study whereas bibliographical data were collected to placate the concern. The article was divided into two major parts. The first part disclosed the prominence of the three mentoring dimensions; rational, relational and missional which began with evaluation aspect. In this study, the three dimensions work as catalysts for the growth of any Christ's follower. The second part discussed the prominent training avenues for the faithful and trustworthy disciples. This part displayed the family, the church and the school as the precious avenues for mentoring and discipleship. It is anticipated that this paper will contribute to the knowledge and skills on how to enhance students' commitment to faith in Christian learning institutions. As far as discipleship is concerned, the study is in harmony with the following statement, "prevention is better than cure." For the bright future of the Christian church, students need to be guarded morally before it is too late.*

**Key word:** Mentor, disciple, training, relationship, community, believer, family, home, school

### Introduction

Mentoring in discipleship can be understood as relationship between the mentor and mentee for the purpose of wholistic growth. This process can be formal or informal depending on the plan of the people involved. Describing the word 'mentor,' the *Encyclopedia of social sciences* (Retrieved 24 February, 2020) states:

The term *mentor* describes a person who consciously and with purpose fosters a relationship between the target of such efforts, the protégé, and the mentor. Mentors typically are older or more seasoned, having a level of experience that allows them to provide guidance, support, and a frame of comparison for protégés to guide the behaviors, choices, thoughts, attitudes, and emotions.

For any plan to be effective and fruitful in life, it must involve responsibility and accountability. In discipleship, evaluation is important for the disciples to know whether they are in the faith (2 Corinthians. 13:5). Dodson (2014) mentions three elements of discipleship: A disciple is rational (learner),

relational (family) and missional (missionary). According to him, the disciple must possess the desire to learn, to build a good relationship with people and to share the good news with others.

In reality, this can only be successful after self-realization. From there, the next thing may be the desire to learn, then building a good relationship with people and lastly, sharing the good news with others. This is according to the Bible and practical experience in spiritual growth.

### Three Biblical Mentorship Dimensions

This part explains the three biblical mentorship principles.

In the process of disciple-making, an individual who comes to God must start to evaluate his/her life. In that adventure, the person will examine himself/herself to see whether he/she is doing the right thing in accordance with the Bible. Jeremiah says "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord" (Lamentations. 3:40). This is related to what Paul exhorts, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that

Jesus Christ is in you— unless indeed you fail the test.” (2 Corinthians. 13:5). Commenting on spiritual approval, Keener (2005) states that the test here is whether Jesus is in them (13:5), as he is in Paul (13:3), and Paul is united with him (13:4); this was an essential mark of the Christian life (e.g., Gal 2:20; Rom 8:9). This is what is called, self-evaluation.

Discipleship begins with an individual before he goes out to meet other people. When a person encounters the invitation of Jesus and starts to evaluate if he/she is worthy to be a disciple of Jesus, he/she will see his/her flaws and frailties. Then perhaps like Paul, he/she will lament, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). Thus, discipleship must begin with him/herself, before he/she advocates out-reach.

The person must do in-reach for his/her soul as Jesus addresses, “you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?” (Rom. 2:21). Commenting on this verse, Bussey (2012) states, “The Jews wanted to teach others, without first teaching themselves. They did not practice what they preached! Here, Paul rebukes them for their failure to keep the law while boasting as the superior to the gentiles. Paul pointed out the Jews’ glaring failure to practice what they professed (Landrum, 2011).

For effective discipleship, before the person helps others, he/she must help him/herself. Evaluating self by teaching it and applying the teaching is emphasized. The first charge, that the Jew who teaches others should teach himself is emphasized here (Moo, 1996). The hypocritical and pretension behaviors are discouraged in the following paragraph:

Jesus warns, “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye.” (Mat. 7:3-5; Luke 6:41, 42). This suggests to the believers to work on their faults before they help others. Jesus is apparently referring to the community of his disciples) removing the speck of dust in his eye, since it is wrong for a person with a “plank” in his eye to offer help (Gabelein, 1984).

It is obvious when a person does a thorough inspection of his/her life, he/she sees him/herself as sinful and wretched (Romans 3:10-12). Then after realizing his/her situation, the person shall find the solution to his/her status. Then the dimension makes sense after the first process of salvation by works fails. Then the person starts to learn about God and how he relates with his creation.

### **Rational**

The rational (learner) category in discipleship seeks to know God and how He can help the person to be saved from his/her situations. The Bible emphasizes on knowing God as the solution. It creates a reach-up relationship with God (Job 22:21). Eternal life is possible by knowing God and Jesus Christ who was sent (John 17:3). This is the must since for the complete fulfillment of our being, we must know God (Tenney, 1981). Like Paul, it is in this dimension where the person recognizes that God sent Jesus Christ to die for him/her (Rom 7:25).

By tracing the original context of the term “disciple” (*mathetes*), it referred to “someone who was either an apprentice in a trade or a pupil of a teacher (Harrington, 2016). The person was connected to the teacher for the purpose of “acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge (Brown, 1975). The rational category embraces the spirit of ongoing revival and reformation as well as the growth of even those who have been baptized and become experienced disciples.

The word “teaching” in Matthew 28:19 is in present continuous tense to show an ongoing process. The rational category of discipleship is “a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith (Blomberg 1992). In discipleship, the goal of learning is not just to acquire skills but to apply what is obtained and completely change one’s life for good. Wilkins (1988) states that the goal of this continuing learning is not to impart knowledge only but to rouse total commitment to Jesus.

The disciple is expected to follow Jesus whose ability and knowledge are significantly greater than his/hers. At this level, he/she is able to declare, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13) and “who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather he was raised, and who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34). With this understanding, he/she is ready to share with and

among the community of believers what Jesus has done and is doing in his/her life.

### **Relational**

Relational (community) is community-based discipleship which calls for responsibility and accountability in the environment of supporting each other in the Church. According to Luke, to be a disciple of Jesus was more than just accepting the theoretical knowledge about Jesus but being involved in the affairs of other believers (Acts 2:44-47;4:32-35). It meant learning from the body of Christ, teachings and serving each other to be better Christians. As the result of the early church's fellowship and unity, Cook (1973) states that, "The church grew rapidly right from the start! It is in the community setting where love, praying and confessing to one another can be practiced (James 5:16; 1 John 4:7).

This dimension develops the members into mature sons and daughters of God. The community of believers is evaluated by the characteristics which shapes it. In the midst of the community, the apostles give testimony of the resurrection of the Lord. Therefore, the role of the Church is first to make an environment for discipleship.

Generally, in the New Testament era, the use of the terminology 'discipleship' signified the intimate relationship and total dedication to the master. The relationship came as the result of upholding his teachings by walking in spirit (Galatians 5:16). This relationship will help the follower of Christ to grow constantly in the knowledge of Jesus into maturity (2 Peter 3:18). Also, this will propel the disciple to share what he/she has learned, thus attracting others to experience, believe and share with others (2 Timothy 2:2).

### **Missional**

The missional (sharing of belief) part in discipleship seeks to understand well the call to "make disciples" (*mathēteusate*) that is portrayed in Matthew 28:19. Making disciples is the first task of the Church in the Great Commission; it must remain the first major task of the Church in every context. The evangelism part of the Great Commission should exceed the obvious methods the Church may use to call people who do not know Jesus. This should be to disciple "all nations" for the aim of rescuing them from their traditions and evil trends. When this is done, the disciples will dedicate themselves daily to the merits of their Savior. Therefore, discipleship is not behaving like Christ but being like Him as Melbourne

(2007) exhorts: Discipleship not only involves what a Christian does on behalf of Christ but also how the disciple represents Christ in the World.

The three discipleship dimensions can also be explained this way: rational can be termed as reach up which signifies personal intimate relationship with God for growth; relational can be reach around which means reaching your fellow members within the community of believers' circle; and the missional dimension can be termed as reach out, signifying reaching those who are outside the community of believers. The true disciple of Jesus as a person must start with self-evaluation to see his/her inability to save him/herself. Then he/she has to have a good relationship with Jesus before he/she builds it with other believers and fellow human beings in general.

The discipleship ministry of God aims at helping all believers to grow. Jesus says that, whoever would "come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Every disciple needs to deny him/herself and follow Jesus by showing practical love to other people. Once he/she begins with him/herself and see the reality that he/she does not qualify, he/she will come to God for help and be able to build a good relationship with his/her community of believers (Matthew 6:33).

In this dimension the person learns to care for others and value each person as the candidate of eternity. The end result of any true disciple of Jesus is to share good news about Jesus Christ with other human beings. The strategy on how the disciple will share good tidings about Christ with people depends on the context, but it must be shared anyway. If this goal is not achieved then discipleship becomes a failure business.

### **Threefold Discipleship Training Avenues**

There are three crucial areas where disciples are prepared; family, church and school. These avenues should be considered as the keys to any successful discipleship strategy to reproduce disciples. These are the pillars of discipleship because they start to mold children from their earliest age to be disciples of Jesus. Parents play their great role to put up the foundation and basis for their children at home. The church does the same at church whereas they are expected to build on the laid foundation by the family. Both family and church should work together in unity for this demanding plan. The last path for

disciple making is the school where the student spends much time schooling. This is an opportunity for God fearing teachers to mold and yield productive disciples of Jesus.

Due to the fact that the world needs people who are faithful even to death, these training boulevards are mandatorily to be observed. White (2000) states:

The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.

The following are the details on how the three paths of discipleship will do to maintain the status of the great commission uttered in the gospel of Matthew 28:19, 20. The reader is expected to get some practical knowledge about the efficiency of the three ways below.

### **The Family**

Bible writers have written tremendously about the topic of discipleship. Its implication is both in the Old Testament and New Testament. This is because the topic is critical for the growth of believers. The family is described as the central means of God to produce disciples of Jesus. It is at this beginning where disciples are shaped. Parents have a unique and precious responsibility before God for their families. In establishing His nation, God instructs parents to teach their children His way at the family level (Deuteronomy 6: 7, 8; Ephesians. 6:4). Therefore, the homes and communities are schools to maintain discipline.

Whether taken literally or metaphorically, the signs described in vv. 8-9 indicate that the individual (v. 8), his home and his community (v. 9) were to be distinguished in their character by obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God (Craigie 1976).

The homes are mentioned as important venues to pass godly knowledge to children. Babies are not

born disciples; they are taught to be, and this can be effectively done holistically in the family. White (1952) says, "Look upon the family circle as a training school, where you are preparing your children for the performance of their duties at home, in society, and in the Church. Disciple making works effectively in three areas like a chain; if the family fails, the Church and school will have a hard time to make disciples. Each one depends on the other.

Parents are the custodians of disciple-making in their families. No one can accomplish their work at the family level. Their job seems to be unique and precious because it creates the destiny of their children from tender age. Talbert (2007) recommends that children should be led into proper behavior with encouragement and reason, not by brute force, which will only discourage them. It is better to choose not to be a parent than to be a parent and fail to do the parental responsibility. This is because parents contribute to the moral life of their children positively or negatively. The relationship in family should always be for building each other for eternity.

The caring parents who fulfill the duty of making disciples in the family are reckoned as fulfilling the Great Commission. The words and instructions of God should be kept in the hearts of children. Teaching children what God expects parents to teach them was the plan of God in the Old Testament. Utilizing any opportunity to teach children was God's directives (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 11:19). Grisant (2012) comments that God requires that his people diligently teach the truth to their children. Moses demands that God's people teach God's expectations to their children and grandchildren repeatedly, in all life's settings. Wherever parents are, they should always teach their children memorable lessons. God calls parents to initiate ministry to the children in their own homes as they fulfill the mission statement "to make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19, 20). The rejection of parents' work at the family level will automatically spread the same spirit to the Church as well as at school level.

It is not the power of words which convinces people to follow Jesus; it is the changed life by Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit which can touch the unconverted people to come to the point of believing. The family which is positively surrendered to Jesus shall be the living testimony to

the people who watch. If the family preaches that Jesus saves; its daily life must show how Jesus has saved them.

People need to see the practicality of what is preached because preaching and uttering words have become a monotonous act as it is stated in the following statement, "The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart (White (1952).

Children in their families learn about God through their parents. The love of God can be shown through the parent-child relationship. When the character of God is misrepresented through the parents, children suffer the consequences. They fail to understand God, His character and His authority. As a result, discipleship begins to fail at the family level. The foundation is important for children because it impacts the whole life (Proverbs 22:6).

Parents are urged to rightly present the character of God in the family in order to make faithful disciples of Jesus. Miller (2004) shows the significance of early training of children for their lifelong as follows: Parental education should likewise begin as early as possible and be according to God's way (Proverb 22:6). This task aims to enable the youth to raise his/her capabilities to the highest pitch of effectiveness and to set him unwaveringly on the right road by correcting his habits and instructing his attitudes. Once trained in this manner, he will not deny this way even when he is old.

Parenting children in their early age according to God's ways means following his instructions in raising them. The trained early children in the ways of God will exhibit their wholistic stability even in their old age. Using biblical principles in instructing children seems to be the best way to raise up useful and effective children for the church as well as for the nation. This is mandatory to be done and any parent who believes in Jesus Christ as his/her personal savior is responsible for the wholistic growth of his/her children.

### **The Church**

Christian literature has been written about discipleship as a kind of life which is recommendable to the true follower of Jesus Christ. Making disciples becomes successful when those experienced leaders live according to what they

teach. The Church is responsible to create favorable environment for the development of disciples. Therefore, every church should be a training school for Christian workers. There should not only be teaching but actual work under experienced instructors White (1933). The biblical story of Eli and Samuel shows how the experienced leaders in the church are responsible to train children to know God (1 Samuel 3:4-10). God can use the feeble but experienced person to direct the inexperienced one to do the right thing before God. He can also use the inexperienced person to take over the leadership.

In the third panel, Eli realizes that the Lord is calling Samuel and gives him instructions on how to respond if he is summoned again (vv. 8-9). In the fourth panel, the Lord approaches and calls Samuel, who responds as instructed (v. 10). The Lord then delivers a prophetic revelation to Samuel (vv. 11-14) (Chisholm Jr., 2013).

This kind of training encourages active participation of the learner and the trainer. Jesus seems to employ this style when He was on earth. Christ's model of mentoring was a successful method. Therefore, Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me. White (1905). He had special moments to share deep and complicated issues with His disciples. That was the reason for His success in ministry (Matthew 24:3).

The above quotation explains the idea that, the Church is a training school where believers learn skills under experienced people. In training, the preference is given to the teaching of actual works, not only theoretical ideologies. In learning institutions students should learn practically from honest professors and lecturers the model of life. Good example teachers will save students regardless of moral erosion that is prevailing in the current generation.

Making every church to be a training school to prepare young people for their life is the plan of God from the beginning. The Garden of Eden had almost everything for the couple's existence. God's plan is not a one-time plan; it is beneficial plan to many generations to come. To be a disciple is to be ready to tell others about what one believes. Therefore, every believer should be a missionary for

God. The Adventist students who join church learning institutions are to be recruited to take responsibilities as missionaries too. Christ calls people from different historical backgrounds to use their experience to call others.

A disciple is ready to interact with other religious beliefs without offending them and yet maintains his/her identity. This work is very important to Christian students who join mixed-faith institutions but are still expected to display their identity as Christ's followers. Joining higher learning institutions should be a privilege for them to fulfill the mission of God. They should know that everything they have belongs to God and they are to use it to redeem the time. You belong to God, soul, body, and spirit. Your mind belongs to God, and your talents belong to Him also (White, 1977). The follower of Christ should use all his/her abilities for the glory of God because all these things belong to Him.

The climax success of discipleship is shown through the character change of the follower from negative to positive. This is done by the unseen power of the Holy Spirit that daily works from within the heart of the believer. When a good character is formed in the life of the believer, then the work of making them disciples will be reached. So whatever good is done in the life of the disciple is not by the mighty of the believer that is why glory and honor belong to God, not to human beings.

### **The School**

God is the initiator of true education. His first assignment in the beginning, was to establish a school where knowledge could be exposed. The Garden of Eden was instituted for such purpose. The Creator of all creation was the first instructor whereby Adam and Eve were students. The Garden was the class and nature was a list of reference literature. Ellen White's description of the situation reads as follows, "As an illustration of its principles a model school was established in Eden. The Garden was the schoolroom, nature was the lesson book, the Creator Himself was the instructor, and the parents of the human family were the students White (2000).

God's example of running school and education in the Garden of Eden should be the model for all institutions. This is because that was His infallible plan implemented before the fall of humanity. If the Church wants to do anything properly including running its educational institutions, it should go

back to the basics to see God's origin plan for it. Working on this, will enable discipleship ministry and making disciples be effective in the Church and in the contemporary world at large.

The leaders of the educational institutions which are owned by the Church should know and practice the mission of the Church. Although among the goals of the Church is to ensure the holistic wellbeing of believers, nothing should be neglected for the development of the followers of Christ. The emphasis that is put on physical development should be as equal as that given to spiritual or social growth.

Theories and ideologies of people are the emphases of scholars which is dangerous to students who have not been sufficiently taught on faith. Christian educational institutions should help students to grow in all dimensions of life. The Bible states, "Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life." (Prov.4:13). Commenting on this verse, Longman III (2006) states the following.

Wisdom is not gained by a onetime decision, but a decision followed by a lifetime of discipline. It is a rigorous endeavor, involving study as well as self-control, especially in light of the apparent rewards from going on the easier path of the wicked.

The offered education in Christian Learning institutions is expected to change the person into a better person. It is expected that it will help them not only on this earth but also in the world to come. Christian learning institutions should be totally different compared to secular ones because of the above-mentioned reason. True education means more than pursuing a certain course of study. It has to do with the whole person and with the whole period of existence possible to human beings White (2000).

The spreading moral erosion in the world today is probably the result of students getting an education that cannot touch the heart of a person. This is head knowledge which alone can never make a person a follower of Jesus Christ. The advice of the word of God is for students to learn in a wholistic manner. God initiated this kind of education in the Garden of Eden when he was teaching Adam and Eve. He did not teach intellectual knowledge for head alone but he also taught moral and spiritual conversion for the heart and that is what it means by a true education.

True education is expected to provide good model and acceptable lifestyles to student which the society and the community of believers may appreciate. Christian educational institutions should provide an area of character building for better citizenry on earth and in the life hereafter. When this goal is not achieved, then the Church declares its failure to the commission of making disciples through education.

True education helps students grow socially, physically, mentally and spiritually (Luke 2:52). Commenting on the themes of education, Salkind (2008) states, "These emerging themes suggest that learning is best facilitated with holistic nurture that equally honors mental, physical, and emotional/social/spiritual stimulation." If the education offered cannot help students to grow holistically, it may termed useless in this sense.

Christian learning institutions should teach discipleship topics to the students who join them. While students who join church institutions may not know the real meaning of being a disciple of Jesus, the schools should teach that discipleship life includes experiencing joy with Jesus, suffering, pain, sorrow and even death (Philippians 1:29). Discipleship life is not only believing in Jesus but also being ready to suffer for Him. While some believers hate suffering and pain in life, the theology of suffering should be part and parcel of the life of all believers of Jesus Christ. This is because it provides patience (James 1:2-4). Commenting on this, Silva (2005) states,

Believers find it difficult enough to accept the inevitability of suffering; we feel we are making spiritual progress if we resign ourselves to the fact that grief cannot be avoided. But here the apostle challenges the Philippians' theology and asks them to understand their afflictions not merely as inevitable but as a manifestation of God's gracious dealings with them.

The theology of suffering must be clear also to the students who join church institutions. Will every soul consider the fact that Christian discipleship includes self-denial, self-sacrifice, even to the laying down of life itself, if need be, for the sake of Him who has given His life for the life of the world (White, 1940). Thus, discipleship strategy is encouraged in educational institutions to save students for Christ. It should not be for head knowledge only but for the wholistic life of students.

## Conclusions

The Bible testifies about the project of God to make disciples of all nations. This project is ongoing since the fall of humankind. The love of God allows human beings to participate in it through different ways. The participation in it benefits both sides for eternity since as one serves others, he/she grows too. There are three dimensions in discipleship, whereas evaluation is the starter of them. The three are named as rational, relational and missional: these are crucial in producing faithful disciples.

On the other hand, three centers or avenues of discipleship; family, church and school are critical for developing disciples of Jesus. Family level facilitates the base of discipleship in the sense that it is the beginning of character building. Parents are important leaders in the family; they are responsible before God as far as making disciples is concerned. Therefore, the family becomes the primary school to build the life of children.

The Church is the next center where disciples are produced. God uses the Church to fulfill His plan. The Church exists for mission—to make disciples of all nations. When making disciples of all nations is not done, the Church ceases to exist. Leaders of the Church who do not plan for disciples making programs are not doing what they are expected to do. Every program in the Church should therefore be leading people to be disciples of Jesus.

The last center of making disciples is the school. God-fearing teachers have been given the privilege to build up students to be disciples of Jesus. It is at this level where students spend most of their time with teachers. Teachers who fear God will see it as an opportunity to influence student lives. All the three levels and paths of discipleship will successfully be achieved when the work will start with God from the beginning.

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