

# WHY DISCIPLESHIP

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*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:19-20*

*“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...” Galatians 2:20*

To be a Christian *is* to be a disciple of Christ. They are synonymous. And not just a disciple, but a *growing* disciple, an adopted son or daughter of God who over time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is being transformed, and is becoming more and more like Jesus. All Christians are called by Christ to be disciples who make other disciples.

Discipleship is absolutely central to the calling, role and life of the church. By discipling its people the church teaches and trains them to better love God, proclaim the gospel to the lost, love one another, love their neighbors and identify how each is called to help build Christ’s kingdom through his bride, the church.

No matter how long you have been a Christian, how much you know the Bible, how extensively you have served Christ and the church, you still can benefit from being a part of the discipleship program of Grace Presbyterian Church (“GPC”) by active and faithful membership and participation in a Discipleship Group. Discipleship is a process which will continue to the end of our present earthly lives. For this reason GPC’s Discipleship Program is for everyone: the new Christian, the mature Christian and everyone in-between.

## *I. Discipleship is Essential for You*

Upon coming to saving faith each Christian becomes an adopted son or daughter, forever and ever, of God.<sup>1</sup> But, when we first believed – when we were born again<sup>2</sup> -- each of us became a *baby* Christian. We became infants in Christ – a very good thing. But we can’t remain infants – we must grow.

Discipleship is the process by which we grow and mature in Christ; this is why discipleship is essential for *you*. If discipleship is undertaken with commitment, prayer and faith, we will mature through

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17

<sup>2</sup> John 3:16

stages of the Christian life, akin to the phases of our biological lives -- we will grow from Christian infants to Christian children to young adults and, ultimately, to mature parents.

This process encompasses the training of **heads, hearts and hands and feet**. The Discipleship Program progressively will:

- Lead us to intentionally submit to Christ's leadership (his Lordship) by changing our *HEADS*, and to increase our understanding of and pattern our daily lives after God's Biblical worldview.
- Enable the Spirit to transform our *HEARTS*, growing us in teachability and humility so that we will better love God, our Christian sisters and brothers and our neighbors.<sup>3</sup>
- Equip us to more effectively use our *HANDS AND FEET*, becoming more effective servants of Jesus as he builds his kingdom by our proclaiming his gospel by word and deed and by our bringing God's love to a fallen world.

#### **A. HEAD TRAINING – Growing in your knowledge of God and his worldview**

God is a God of self-revelation. In the Bible he has told us who he is and about his attributes -- his glory, his might, his sovereignty, his justness, his love. He also has taught us who *we* are, beloved creations made by him in his image, yet infected with rebelliousness and sin. He has told us about his amazing redemption plan for fallen people who turn to him, as well as where all human history is heading.

The Discipleship Program will increase your knowledge of God and his plans for you and his church, by teaching what the Bible says about these topics (among others):

- The meaning and scope of the gospel
- The authority of scripture
- The Biblical story of creation, fall, redemption and consummation
- What it means to be a Christian: our union with Christ, our status as adopted sons and daughters of God, and our call to serve Christ, his church and his kingdom
- What the Bible says about God's view of the world, including how people are called to live in society and in relation to one another, including in singleness and marriage.

#### **B. HEART TRAINING – Allowing the Spirit to transform our heart in humility, love and Christ-likeness**

In the Discipleship Program you will come to a deeper awareness of how deep our sin problem is, yet how we are utterly loved by God and forgiven through Christ. Together we will become more aware of our sins, more truly repentant, more humble, more aware of our utter need for Christ and his cross and more willing and able to forgive others. We will more sincerely and

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:2

deeply love God, one another and our neighbors. If we are faithful we will grow progressively in attaining the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

This will be hard work requiring faith, prayer and commitment. It will take us out of our comfort zones. We will ask you to be more transparent than probably you've ever been, and to commit to being held accountable within the confines of a small community. But our model as always is Jesus, who "being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even to death on a cross."<sup>5</sup>

By being transparent with one another in our Discipleship Groups we will be growing in our likeness to Christ. By being held accountable to one another iron will sharpen iron<sup>6</sup> and we will grow in obedience. Our hearts simply will not be changed unless we are committed to accountability within community. And by having our hearts and lives progressively transformed into Jesus' likeness we will be much better able to serve Christ in his gospel and kingdom mission.

### **C. HANDS AND FEET TRAINING – Equipped to more effectively serve Christ as he builds his kingdom through us**

From his calling of his first disciples, Christ's kingdom work and the proclamation of his gospel has been undertaken by his disciples. Upon Christ's ascension this has been *entirely* the case. Throughout the last two millennia Christ's people have been called to faith by disciples of Jesus telling them the gospel. The church has been built solely by God working through Christ's disciples. Also, the vast amount of mercy and service delivered in the name and on behalf of Christ — the alleviation of poverty and other need, the provision of healthcare, the quest for justice, on and on – has been undertaken by disciples.

The Discipleship Program will equip you to serve in multiple ways, including but not limited to:

***Evangelism.*** The Great Commission calls *all* Christians to be disciple-makers. Not all of us have the gift and calling of preaching, but *every* Christian should be able to share the gospel with a non-believer. The most loving thing we can do for lost people is share the gospel, for they who do not know Jesus are lost for eternity.

***The Church.*** The Church is the primary instrument through which Christ is building his kingdom. The Church is not just a Sunday gathering in which the pastor preaches and the people sing and have coffee with one another afterwards. Rather, it is a comprehensive seven-day-a-week community of believers in Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:22-26

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:8

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 27:17

The Bible teaches that *God has given each and every member of the church gifts specifically for use in the church.*<sup>7</sup> The Church is the body of Christ, with Christ as its head, and each Christian is a member of the body. As we grow through discipleship we will more deeply understand our connectedness with the body and the importance of serving it. The Discipleship Program will help us identify the gifts God has given each one of us for use in the GPC community, serving with humble and tender hearts.

***Our neighbors/the world.*** The second part of Jesus' "Great Command" is that we love our neighbors as ourselves. GPC's Discipleship program will equip us to do this better, from a place of Christian humility and maturity.

## *II. Discipleship is Essential for the Church*

Your committed participation in the Discipleship Program is centrally important to GPC's life and spiritual health and the achievement of its vision and mission. Over time an increasing number of growing disciples meets nearly every need of the church:

- A united, joyful church, in which all members are integral parts of the community (the body).
- A church where people are growing in spiritual maturity across its membership.
- A church in which each member's spiritual gifts are assessed and utilized.
- The effective identification and development of elders, deacons and ministry team leaders – *and* mature (parental level) Christians called to lead Discipleship Groups
- A multiplication of disciples, as we become disciples who make disciples.
- More proactive and effective evangelism and outreach to our unbelieving neighbors
- More committed Sunday attendance and greater commitment to all other church functions and activities.
- Sunday worship will be both more somber in our confession of sin yet more joyous in our praises and celebration of God for who he is and what he has done and is doing
- A deeper understanding that everything we have has come from God. From this will flow more generous *giving*, enabling GPC to more effectively pursue her work.
- The people of GPC will become fruitful, long-lasting salt and a brighter greater gospel light.<sup>8</sup>

As GPC becomes this kind of attractive, gospel-centered church word about us will get out. We will draw visits and commitments from newcomers who already are Christians, as well as attention and (we pray) visits from non-Christians in the wider community looking for hope and truth. We will grow both numerically and in Christ-like maturity.

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 12:3-8

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:13-14

*Conclusion:*

*YOU need discipleship:* Jesus has commanded it. We are called to grow progressively into the image of Christ, a life-long process, so that each of us can say with Paul that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”<sup>9</sup>

*GCP needs you to be disciples who make disciples,* so that it can realize its vision to see Long Island awakened to the glory of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> Galatians 2:20