

THE ORDINARY
PERSON'S GUIDE
TO DISCIPLINING
TEENAGERS

DR. ALLEN JACKSON

YM360

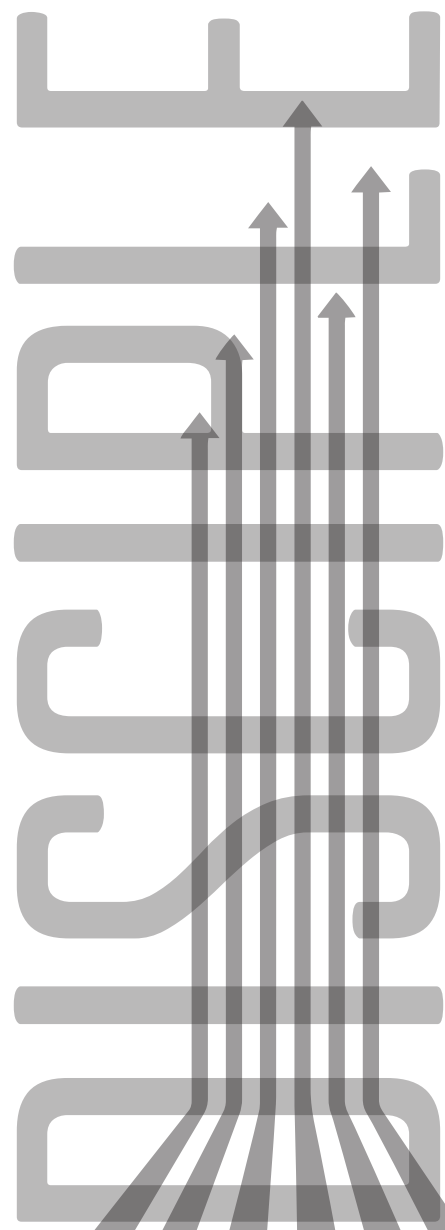
Thanks for downloading this sample
of *Disciple* by Dr. Allen Jackson.

**This book is a guide to discipling teenagers,
written for the everyday youth worker. If
you're a veteran, or a beginner, there is
something in *Disciple* for you.**

If you have any questions about *Disciple*,
please don't hesitate to call us at 1-888-
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DISCIPLE

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TEENAGERS

by Dr. Allen Jackson
Foreword by Wade Morris

*To the ordinary youth workers who
have answered an extraordinary call.*

Disciple: The Ordinary Person's Guide To Discipling Teenagers

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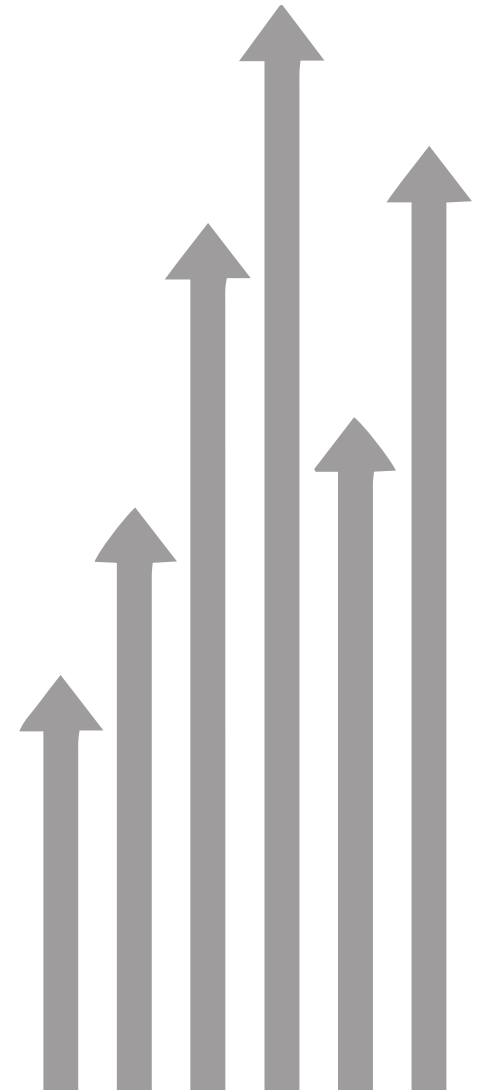
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Last summer, Allen Jackson and I continued a discussion that had been ongoing between us for some time. We were at a camp together, and we were allowed to use a session to talk about the relationship between evangelism and discipleship. For the adults who were in the session, it probably looked like a tennis match. But for Allen and me, it was a rich time.

We were strengthened in our understanding that the urgent need of students taking a stand for Jesus was both immediate (evangelism) and for a lifetime (discipleship). I recognize in this book some of the concepts Allen so passionately relayed in that discussion, as well as many others. Combined, this is a great word and a great read. I love what Allen does in this book. The chapter that most reflects our discussion from that fateful camp is, “The DNA of Discipleship.” I believe it is particularly helpful to a person looking for handles on the process of discipleship with students.

I would be remiss if this foreword was just about *Disciple* and not the man that wrote it. Without question, Dr. Allen Jackson has influenced, impacted, and mentored more student pastors than anyone in my generation. His position teaching youth ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, his experience as a student pastor, and his true depth of knowledge of the Bible, has led him to go even deeper in his teaching with this new book *Disciple*. Allen explores, among other things, the understanding of the importance of both discipleship and evangelism within the church, as well as student ministries. It is a must read for the church today.

It was quite hard to write only a few words here. I did the best I could to keep it short. I appreciate my friendship with Allen, and I appreciate this book and the place it deserves on the bookshelves of youth workers everywhere.

Wade Morris
 Itinerant Minister
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 December 2014

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Youth Worker,

This book is for you. I am so very aware that many, many (x100,000) books have been written on the subject of discipleship. It would be fair to ask what is different about this one. Well, for one thing it is (intentionally) shorter than most. I wanted you to be able to read it in an hour and a half. Tops. For another, it reflects many of the current discussions going on in youth ministry. It's practical. It's relevant. And it's approachable.

I believe there's also something in *Disciple* for everyone. If you're a youth ministry veteran, you'll find this book to be a good refresher on the core principles you have built your ministry on. If you're not a veteran, or if you find yourself searching for help on how to lead teenagers to become more like Christ, *Disciple* will give you a great framework for discipling teenagers. *Disciple* doesn't solve all of the theological mysteries of the universe. But it does lay down some basic principles that we can all get our minds around. The content is the result of discussions with youth ministers, parents, and students, hopefully arranged in a manner that maximizes your ability to apply it in your ministry. I pray that it's a great resource for you and for the adult volunteers on your team.

In the book, you will find theory as well as "how to." You will find a treatment of some of the classic practices of discipleship—Scripture memory, telling our stories, presenting the Gospel, etc. You will see discussions about the partnership between families and youth ministries in the discipling of students. You will see content, process, and relationship; all aimed at helping a generation mature in their faith.

I enjoyed writing *Disciple*. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Sincerely,

Dr. Allen Jackson

A few years ago, I wrote a book entitled, *Teach*, which had as its purpose to communicate some basic Bible study teaching ideas and techniques to people who might not have been to Bible College or Seminary. It was not meant to be highly technical or academic. In fact, my promise to readers was that they could finish the book in less than two hours. (My good friend Jim Graham edited *Teach*, and he and I talked a lot about this book. He contributed much to Chapter 5.)

The target audience for *Disciple* is similar to the target audience for *Teach*. It is either a person who enlists, equips, and encourages others to lead discipleship groups (typically a youth minister), or the actual leader of such a group (in most cases, an adult volunteer). Whatever your interest in discipleship, I hope this book is helpful. I pray that whether you are a youth minister or an adult volunteer, you would find something in this book that helps you be more effective at leading teenagers closer to Christ.

To make the reading a little easier, let's define the disciple as the one who is the learner, and the disciplemaker as the one who leads and guides the discipleship relationship. To make it even easier, I want you to intentionally picture in your mind the types of students who are open, maybe even eager, to strengthen their faith relationship with Christ. And I want to challenge you to consider that there may be more of these students in your youth group than you may think. I believe most of the teenagers in our youth ministries long to know Jesus more. I think they want a more authentic faith. And there is an interesting survey that backs this up.

In 2011, Group magazine published the findings of a survey they administered to 20,000 Christian teenagers. They gave these teenagers a list of 41 different activities they might participate in during the course of their involvement in their youth group. They asked the students to rank the ones they want more of, and the ones they want less of. The results are highly encouraging.

- 91.2% of teenagers responded that they wanted "more of" learning about Jesus. Let that sink in.
- 83.9% reported that they wanted more "Experiences that teach about God and His truths."

- 81.9% said they wanted more help learning how to pursue God on their own.
- 81.5% reported that they wanted more help in understanding the Bible.
- 74% said they wanted more opportunities for evangelism.¹

This is an incredible response, isn't it? Many people will lament the current spiritual state of our teenagers. And while 88.9% did in fact respond that they wanted more games and fun activities (they're teenagers, after all), overall, the picture painted is of teenagers who are ready and willing to go deeper in their faith. As you think about these responses, you might have envisioned some of the teenagers at your church. These students desire to learn significant things of God, to reflect on them, and to live them out accordingly. Don't let the image of these teenagers' faces out of your head as you read the rest of this book.

DISCIPLESHIP DEFINED

If you are reading this book, you have a heart for discipleship. But are you a disciple? For every principle we cover in this book, we'll ask two questions: How do we see this at work in the life of the disciplemaker? And how do we see it at work in the life of the disciple? But before we go on, let's get on the same page of what we mean when we talk about discipleship.

A disciple is a learner. A follower. Warren Wiersbe describes a disciple as such:

"A disciple is a learner, one who attaches himself or herself to a teacher in order to learn a trade or subject. Perhaps our nearest modern equivalent is "apprentice," one who learns by watching and doing. The word for disciple was the most common name for the followers of Jesus Christ and is used more than 245 times in the Gospels and the Book of Acts."²

The word from which we get the word disciple has the same root as "discipline" and appropriately so. A while back I borrowed the title of one of Eugene Peterson's books as my definition of discipleship: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.³ Peterson is an author, pastor, and speaker, and this book spoke to me. It

describes the journey of a pilgrim as opposed to a tourist. A pilgrim is on a quest, searching for something tangible, while a tourist walks around taking pictures and hoping he or she remembers the places they have been.

Peterson describes the journey using the Psalms of Ascent (Psalm 120-135), as these songs are the ones used by the Hebrew families as they traveled to Jerusalem for their annual pilgrimage. It is not an instant, “just add water and microwave for 30 seconds,” process. These pilgrims were on the way to a holy place where they expected to meet and be met by God. They sacrificed to get there. And yet, along the way, the families who traveled together sang together: “I lift up my eyes to the hills . . . where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.”⁴ I picture the Dad asking the question, and the children answering. They were on a spiritual quest that I can pretty easily compare to discipleship.

I believe the interaction we call discipleship has a few characteristics that separate it from other types of teacher/pupil relationships:

Discipleship is intentional.

The relationship is initiated either by the disciple or the disciplinemaker for the purpose of maturing toward the biblical ideal (mostly on the part of the disciple, but the disciplinemaker also grows closer to Christ).

Discipleship is directional.

The disciplinemaker is clearly the leader in the process, but relationship “flows” in both directions. In other words, the relationship is reciprocal. It is a two-way street, not a one-way street.

Discipleship is accountable.

Those involved in a discipleship relationship must hold each other accountable for both sin and righteousness. They must agree that they will follow through on commitments, and call each other out when they (either one) fail to do so. There should also be positive accountability in the form of praise when commitments are kept and challenges met.

Discipleship is measurable.

Both disciple and disciplinemaker should ideally see progress toward specific goals.

Discipleship is seasonal.

The active, intentional meeting for the purpose of discipleship may

only last a few months or years. However the relationships last a lifetime (and possibly an eternity . . . I’ll get back to you on that).

Discipleship is informational.

Truth about Scripture and life is passed from disciplinemaker to disciple.

Discipleship is transformational.

A new lifestyle is learned. New habits are formed. Interactions with family, church, and culture change.

Discipleship has been compared to coaching, mentoring, teaching, and networking. I believe it lessens the importance of the discipleship relationship to compare it to terms that have secular application. I will admit that “disciple” is not an exclusively Christian concept, even though the relationship between Jesus and His closest followers is the model for this discussion. Searching for a proper metaphor, or analogy, to describe the discipleship process can be tricky.

A few years ago, several popular preachers and authors began to use a certain phrase to describe the discipleship process: “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.” Maybe you heard this phrase when it was circulating. The idea was to describe the position of a disciple who followed so closely behind his master on a dirt road, supposedly in Palestine, that the dust kicked up by the teacher’s sandals made the disciple a candidate for a bath. It is a great metaphor. The only problem is that it is pretty poor scholarship. The phrase is a mutation of a traditional rabbinic saying, and has been pretty squarely debunked as historically inaccurate.⁵

But for the sake of argument, and a good visual, let’s agree that the rabbi’s dust thing is a good illustration. Like other metaphors (spiritual father and son, coach and player, teacher and pupil, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker), it does succeed in helping us understand the relationship between disciple and disciplinemaker. The disciplinemaker is the one who guides the discipleship relationship: the content, the pace, and even the direction. The disciple is the one who learns and benefits from the wisdom of the teacher, hopefully with the goal of becoming a disciplinemaker in his or her own right. Paul wrote the poster-child example of this process in 2 Timothy 2:2:

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

**DISCIPLESHIP IS INTENTIONAL.
DISCIPLESHIP IS DIRECTIONAL.
DISCIPLESHIP IS ACCOUNTABLE.
DISCIPLESHIP IS MEASURABLE.
DISCIPLESHIP IS SEASONAL.
DISCIPLESHIP IS INFORMATIONAL.
DISCIPLESHIP IS TRANSFORMATIONAL.**

I am among many Bible readers who note the four “generations” of discipleship reflected in this verse: Paul, Timothy, reliable men, and others. Paul described a process, much like a relay race (another metaphor). Each leg of the race involved a disciplemaker handing the baton to a disciple, who then became a disciplemaker, and so on.

The Bible is full of examples of such relationships. Here are just a few of the more memorable ones:

- Jethro and Moses
- Naomi and Ruth
- Elijah and Elisha
- Barnabas and Paul
- Paul and Timothy

Scripture is clear: we are called to disciple, and be disciplined. The rich biblical tradition of faith transmission from person-to-person isn’t some long lost ideal. It’s one of the primary ways God has established for us to grow in our faith. And so, the question is: Are you a disciplemaker? One aspect of the disciplemaker’s task is to say, “Come to where I am.” What specific individuals have you called to your side? Another aspect of the disciplemaker’s task is to say, “Come with me as I go.” Who have you asked to join you on your journey?

As you ponder these questions, I’ll say something that probably goes without saying (but I will say it anyway): You can’t bring anybody to where you aren’t. And you can’t take anybody to a place to which you aren’t going. In the Bible, there are lots of times when Jesus was one place, but in the next few verses, you realize He was in another place. If His disciples were going to be with Him when He changed locations, they had to move when He moved. The discipleship process is dynamic in that way.

BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND

Years ago, the phrase, “Beginning with the end in mind,” captured my attention when I first read Steven Covey’s popular book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey listed this as a

successful habit. The idea is that if we want to arrive at a certain destination, or achieve a certain outcome, then we identify that outcome before we start the journey. Starting a journey before you know where you're going, though fun for sight-seeing, rarely makes for a successful trip.

You may or may not know that I am a professor at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I live on campus, in a home owned by the seminary, in a community with other faculty, staff, and students. In August 2005, I evacuated my home in New Orleans just ahead of Hurricane Katrina. The entire city, including the seminary, was flooded. I was out of my house for 13 months.

During that year, I lived with my family in a number of places, finally moving back into my home in September 2006. A large part of the stress that accompanied my "Katrina Experience" was that I felt like I was making it up as I went along. Information was hard to come by, and if someone asked me what the destination was, I couldn't say. I was on a journey that did not have a clear destination. It was not a pleasant experience.

During those "Katrina months," my goals as a child of God, husband, father, seminary professor, and friend changed almost daily as I tried to figure out how to get through the current day. With or without a hurricane, this mindset might sound familiar to many youth workers. Lacking a firm definition of ministry success, the ministry gets by based on whatever new information is provided by a publisher, website, or coffee-driven discussion with other youth ministers. Some of this information is good. Some is bad. But in this scenario, all of it is passed along absent of any plan. In this scenario, there was no starting with the end in mind.

I have a GPS unit in my car, as well as on my phone. It gives me a clue as to where I am going. But what it cannot do is to choose my destination for me. It cannot say (though it has a pleasant voice), "Allen, since you don't really know where you are going, just start driving and I will tell you when you are getting close." It can show me a map, but I have to interpret the map. It can only tell me exactly how to proceed as long as I have identified a destination.

As Hurricane Katrina meandered around in the Gulf of Mexico, the steering currents (both water and wind) were of supreme importance. These currents would direct the storm to its ultimate landfall. So to identify the steering currents was to have information needed to make a plan. Unfortunately, in youth ministry, especially

as it pertains to the discipleship process, the steering currents are not so much identified as they are reacted to. For many youth workers, the buzzwords of the day (the next big thing, what the guy down the road is doing, etc.) are the currents that drive their youth ministry programming.

I don't want you to hear me making any unfair generalizations; many youth ministries are working from solid, strategic, and God-honoring planning. They have identified the currents and have recognized that they are important. These are healthy, thriving youth ministries that equip students to live dynamic faith-lives. But the struggle for a discipleship philosophy is a real issue for many youth workers. This is one reason I wrote this book. My prayer is that it will, in some way, equip youth workers like yourself with a foundation from which to build a strategic discipleship initiative at your church.

A LAST FIRST THOUGHT

I hope you are straining at the bit at the thought of initiating or refining discipleship relationships with teenagers. I don't want to throw water on the fire, but it will not be easy. Discipleship is discipline. And in Hebrews 12:11, we are reminded that "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Focusing on your own need for discipleship will not always be pleasant. Working to become a proficient disciplinemaker requires great commitment. But you must remember that God has called you to this task, which means He plans on working in and through you. Take heart. You are in the perfect position to be moved and to move others.

In chapter 2, we will consider the "who" of discipleship. But first, let me ask you to slow down, breathe a little, and answer the following questions. Maybe you can even start a journal since I will ask you to stop at the end of each of these chapters and reflect a little bit. I call that section, "What about you?"

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

1. Have you ever been in a disciple/disciplemaker relationship? Write a paragraph about your memories of that relationship.
2. Why does discipleship matter? In your own words, jot down a few thoughts as to why you might want to be a part of the process.
3. If you were to ask someone to be your disciplemaker today, who would it be? Why? What would you hope to learn?
4. Are you currently discipling teenagers? If so, what is working for you? What do you see that isn't working or needs to improve?
5. Do you want to start discipling teenagers but haven't yet? Take some time to pray over your efforts, the potential students you will reach, and your own level of spiritual commitment. Commit to continuing to pray for these things.

CHAPTER 2

THE "WHO" OF DISCIPLESHIP

One of my favorite Dr. Seuss stories is *Horton Hears A Who*. If you recall, the story is about an elephant named Horton who discovers a civilization on a speck of dust. The story begins with Horton splashing around in a pool in the jungle. Suddenly, he hears a small voice calling for help. Of course, you recall, he doesn't see anyone. But he responds anyway: "I'll help you," said Horton. "But who are you? Where?"¹ Horton quickly realizes that the voice is coming from a speck of dust floating through the air.

A few paragraphs later, the elephant Horton realized that someone or something was on that speck of dust and it needed his help. He utters the fairly famous line, "A person is a person no matter how small," then engages the voice in dialogue. Horton comes to realize that there is indeed a microscopic civilization on this speck of dust, a civilization that could use his help. This initial exchange ends with Horton making a promise, of sorts, to the Mayor of the town: "You're safe now. Don't worry. I won't let you down."

You're safe. I won't let you down. When we are confident in the person saying those words, they provide immense comfort. Students may never acknowledge the comfort and assurance they feel when an adult disciplemaker conveys those sentiments, but I am convinced they need to hear them. The pace of our students' world is breathtakingly faster than it was just a few decades ago. The myriad of choices, the relentless flow of information, and the instant gratification of the culture combine to make us wonder if a disciplemaker can compete. I believe we can. But we have to start with an understanding of who students are, who we are, and how the discipleship relationship can give some guidance to the "whos" gathered on this speck of dust we call church.

THE WHOS ARE CHANGING

There is a lot of talk about the rapid changes we've seen in this generation of teenagers. And for good reason. Culture is advancing at a rapid rate. But if all we do is focus on the changes that are happening outside teenagers, we miss many of the internal changes. And these changes are some of the most significant when it comes to teenagers growing and maturing. It is said that