



ENCOURAGING DISCIPLING RELATIONSHIPS



HOW DO I GET CONNECTED IN A DISCIPLING RELATIONSHIP?



We are on a mission to multiply transformed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ until all of Barry and Allegan County are saturated with the gospel to the glory of God. Doing so requires you live on mission for Jesus where you live, learn, work, play, and worship. With this emphasis, a common question asked is, “How do I get connected in a discipling relationship?”

That is a great question and we hope this article will help answer some of your questions and help you to get connected in a spiritually encouraging discipling relationship. Of course, the pastors at OBC are happy to talk with you further about any questions you may still have. It’s our prayer that our deliberate love and spiritual care for each other will build up the body of Christ at OBC, will make the work of the gospel more visible in our lives, and ultimately will bring glory to God.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'DISCIPLING'?

In one sense, almost everything we do as a local church is about being and making disciples. The songs we sing, the prayers we pray, and certainly the sermons preached all aim to grow us as God-glorifying disciples. Our relationships as we live, serve, and learn at OBC are also an important part of our growth in discipleship. But for the purposes of this brief article, we have something more specific in mind. When we write "discipling" we are thinking particularly about individual relationships. We are talking about the intentional encouragement and training of disciples of Jesus on the basis of deliberate, loving relationships.

One place we can read about these loving relationships between Christians is the gospel of John. In John 15:17, Jesus says, *"This is my command: Love each other."* Jesus goes on to describe how he has loved us and, by implication, gives us ideas about how we should love one another as His disciples.



Intentional: *“You didn’t choose me. I chose you...”* (John 15:16). Jesus did not merely stumble across his disciples – he took loving initiative. Christ-like love is not passive, rather, it takes initiative.

Purposeful: *“...I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit.”* (John 15:16). Christ’s love for His disciples is purposeful. It is not merely sentimental. It has a wonderful, God-glorifying agenda. As you seek to make disciples your agenda must be the spiritual good of your friend and God’s glory through their joy in the gospel.

Relational: *“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.”* (John 15:9) and *“Now you are my friends...”* (John 15:15). We must relate to one another as loving friends. We must not treat others as projects. We should pour out our very lives for one another’s good in Christ-like, loving relationships.

Joyful: *“I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow.”* (John 15:11). Jesus’ purpose in his instruction to love one-another is that we would know His joy. Discipling others to grow in grace is hard work. But it is wonderful, joy-producing work – in your life and in the life of those you are discipling!

Normal: Jesus makes this kind of loving discipling his basic command to all his people and, thus, normal for all Christians. Jesus commands us to love others as he has loved us. Hebrews 3:13 tells us, *“You must warn each other every day, while it is still called ‘today,’ so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.”* In Romans 12:10 we are told, *“Love each other with genuine affection.”*

As a member of OBC, we want you to help us sustain this culture of discipling by letting other members get to know you and by working to get to know other members. And we want you to do this with the aim of encouraging and being encouraged by one another.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A “CULTURE OF DISCIPLING?”

Most dictionaries define a “culture” as something like “the shared values, goals, and practices that characterize a group.” That’s kind of what we have in mind when we talk about wanting to encourage a “culture of discipling” at OBC. We want to see discipling one-another as an obvious characteristic of our church – not merely a program or activity but as a basic part of the fabric of our community. While formal programs are not necessarily bad, we think that they fall short of Biblical discipling. We want to encourage a culture where it is simply normal for members, out of love for Christ and one-another, to take the initiative to build relationships with other members with the deliberate aim of doing them spiritual good.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IN A DISCIPLING RELATIONSHIP?

There is no “Set program” or form for discipling relationships at OBC. So how does one do this?

A few thoughts:

- **Intercede:** Pray about those you rub shoulders with in your spaces (live, learn, work, play, worship).
- **Identify:** Who is God laying on your heart?
- **Incarnate:** Don't suffer from paralysis analysis. Deliberately come alongside one or two of the same gender to help them grow in specific ways in Christ. Ask them if they would like to get together on a regular basis to read God's Word, pray together, and hold each other accountable. Don't just gravitate to people who are like you. Younger men and older men should pair up. Older women and younger women should pair up. Seek to enter into one another's lives! Be humble listeners. Speak the truth in love. Live life together. Discipling is not just about the books you read or the times you pray but the battles you fight. Spend time together and keep God's Word in the center. Keep the goal central – increasingly over time reflecting the character and priorities of Christ!



This is going to look different based on different seasons of life. The key is intentionally including others into the routines of your life.

- Maybe two friends decide to read a chapter from the Gospel of John and then discuss it over coffee or a workout at the gym.
- Maybe two moms take the kids to the park and go on a walk and encourage one another in the Lord.
- Maybe two couples do a date night together once a month and talk about what the Bible says about marriage.
- Maybe a godly older lady has a younger lady over to her home on Tuesday afternoon to pray and study together.
- Maybe a father and son go on a walk and enjoy God's creation together.
- Maybe an older godly man meets with a younger man to discuss the sermon together.
- Maybe one family invites another family over to sit in on family devotions.
- Maybe mothers go on errands together and build each other up in Christ as they do so.

We could list many more but we trust you get the point. We think it's not so important exactly what you do but that you simply decide to relate to one another with the intentional aim of encouraging them with truth from God's Word. Be creative! Be flexible! But also be intentional about loving one-another in the best, the highest, the most Biblical way by deliberately setting out to relate to one-another with the aim of doing the other person spiritual good.



HOW CAN I GET INTO A **DISCIPLING RELATIONSHIP?**

- 1** As a member of OBC, you are simply free to take personal initiative to try to work out a discipling relationship with any other OBC member of your same gender. You don't need to sign up for anything or get permission from anyone. It's our hope that as you get to know other members of OBC you will find a member whose schedule and availability match up with your own. If so, you should feel free to invite that person to meet up regularly to pray and be encouraged by God's Word together.
- 2** Join a small group such as a growth group, young adults, or our men and women's ministry. You will find many opportunities in these small group settings to develop deeper relationships that intentionally point to Christ.
- 3** If, for whatever reason, none of these avenues results in a regular discipling relationship, feel free to contact one of the pastors for help. But we do encourage you to give your own personal initiative a try first. You might just find that taking the initiative to be a source of spiritual encouragement for others is one of the most satisfying experiences in your life as a Christian. And you just might find yourself understanding even more clearly what Jesus meant when he said, *"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples"* (John 13:35).