

So You've Been Asked to Disciple Someone

A practical guide for new disciplers: expectations, boundaries, and safeguards

You Are Qualified Enough

Paul told Timothy to entrust the faith to "faithful men" (2 Timothy 2:2), not finished ones. The same apostle said he had not "already obtained this or am already perfect" (Philippians 3:12). You do not need to be a scholar or a pastor. You need to be a step further along, honest about your own growth, and willing to show up. Barnabas did not have all the answers about Saul; he simply took him by the hand and vouched for him (Acts 9:27).

What You Are, and What You Are Not

You are...	You are not...
A fellow learner a little further down the road	A therapist or counselor
A guide into the Scriptures	Their pastor or elder
A friend who asks honest questions	Their savior, or the Holy Spirit
An example to imitate, as you imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)	Someone who must have every answer

Your Commitments

- **Show up.** Keep the schedule in your covenant. Reliability is itself a lesson.
- **Prepare.** Come with questions, not just good intentions.
- **Pray.** Pray for the person by name between meetings.
- **Share your life.** Paul shared "not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Be honest about your own struggles, appropriately.
- **Keep confidence,** within the limits below.
- **Have a Paul yourself.** Disciples need to be disciplined too.

Pairing Norms

- **One-on-one discipleship is men with men and women with women** (Titus 2:3-8).
- Mixed-gender discipleship happens in groups, or with married couples meeting with married couples.
- Meet where others can see you: a coffee shop, the church building during open hours, a home with family present.

Confidentiality and Its Limits

Say this at your first meeting, so no one is surprised later:

"What you share with me stays between us, with three exceptions: if you are at risk of harming yourself or someone else, if a child or vulnerable adult is being abused, or if a serious crime is ongoing. In those cases I will need to involve others, and I will tell you before I do whenever I safely can."

Many states treat clergy, and sometimes church workers, as mandated reporters of child abuse. Know your church's policy and your state's law before you begin.

When to Bring in Others

Referring someone is not abandoning them. Keep meeting while others help.

Bring in...	When...
An elder or pastor	Serious unrepented sin; a marriage in crisis; doctrinal questions beyond you; matters of church discipline; conflict with another member.
A professional counselor or doctor	Signs of depression, severe anxiety, or trauma; addiction; eating problems; anything that looks medical.
Emergency help, right away	Talk of suicide or self-harm: call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, U.S.) or 911. Immediate danger: call 911.
Civil authorities	Suspected abuse of a child or vulnerable adult. Report to the authorities, not only to church leadership.

Discipling Someone Under 18

- ☐ Parents know about the relationship and have agreed to it.
- ☐ Your church's child-protection policy is followed, including any background check.
- ☐ You are never alone with the young person behind a closed door. Meet in public or open settings, or with another adult present.
- ☐ Messages and calls are visible to a parent: copy them, or use a group thread. No private social-media messaging.
- ☐ Physical contact is limited to what is public and appropriate.
- ☐ Any suspicion of abuse is reported to civil authorities as the law requires.

Healthy Boundaries

- **Point beyond yourself.** The goal is dependence on Christ and His church, not on you.
- **Keep time limits.** Start and end when you agreed. Emergencies are the exception, not the pattern.
- **Don't lend money.** If there is a real financial need, involve the deacons.
- **Watch your heart.** If romantic or unhealthy emotional attachment develops on either side, pause the pairing and talk to your pastor.

When It Isn't Working

Missed meetings, no follow-through, or a relationship that never moves past small talk all call for an honest conversation. Ask what is getting in the way. Sometimes the answer is a season of life; sometimes counting the cost (Luke 14:28) shows a person isn't ready yet. It is fine to pause and try again later.

This guide is pastoral counsel, not legal advice. Always follow your church's safeguarding policy and the laws of your state.