

DISCIPLESHIP IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF IBARA BAPTIST
CHURCH, ABEOKUTA, OGUN CONFERENCE

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF
MASTER OF DIVINITY IN THEOLOGY

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MATRIC. NO. 07/0046

2013 — 0563

JUNE 2012.

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ABSTRACT

Disciple making is the commission given to every believer of Christ, as given by the Master Jesus Christ, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father,, and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20, RSV). The earlier disciples that were disciple by Jesus Christ Himself spent quality time following Jesus. Jesus was associating with them, teaching them and sending them out that by the time they were commissioned and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they were able to effect a positive change like their Master. This essay looked into how Discipleship was being carried out in churches in the Nigerian Baptist Convention with particular reference to Ibara Baptist Church, Abeokuta. Disciple making is supposed to be in geometric progression. Are the disciples making disciples of all nations or just contended with their own spiritual growth alone? Discipleship is not a once and for all life programme, but continued life-long programme. The continuity in the relationship between the disciples and disciple was researched into. Finally, by the time a Christian goes deep into discipleship he is expected to be an agent of positive change, that is, to play some leadership roles within ad outside the church. The research observed that the regularity of personal spiritual exercises diminished slightly after training. The relationship between the leaders and disciples in training reduced significantly after the training sessions, and graduate of Masterlife did not find it mandatory to lead and continue leading discipleship groups. Discipleship is a serious commission. A disciple is like a soldier of Christ. His training, therefore, must be thorough and deep like that of a soldier.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Generally, apart from memorizing of scriptural verses, the respondents fared better in personal matters than interpersonal matters. Just as faith is a personal things, i.e an issue of the heart, its manifestation is in works and by works faith is made perfect (Jas. 2:22). And as we are called to ministry, this ministry is relationship. If the effectiveness of discipleship training is to be enhanced more work still has to done in the area of field work and interpersonal relationship by the pupils and the leaders of discipleship training. The starting place will be reducing the barriers to free relationship between the disciples and the disciplers. Jesus called His disciples friends (Jn. 15:15). Therefore, the relationship between the disciples and the disciplers should ultimately lead to friendship. The Bible says, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend (Prov. 27:17). This is the basic guiding principle of disciple – discipler relationship. It is to be noted here that it is not only the disciple that is being sharpened, the discipler is sharpened also as he is trying to responsible to his calling.

This relationship is life-longed even when the pupils has graduated into being a "co-labourer". This has advantage of having trusted counselor who also understands you, your worldview and also a matured Christian He is in a good position to give counsel while factoring in your worldview. It is when discipleship is done with spiritual mentorship in mind that we can begin to make the most of our discipleship training.

5.3 RECOMMENDATION

To a Christian

If you have decided to be a Christian and your desire is to stay a Christian till death then your desire could only be achieved if Christ Himself abide in you, for without Him you can do nothing (Jn. 15:5) And for Christ to abide in you, you have to present yourself as a vessel for Him. This can only be done by undergoing discipleship. If you want to follow the Great Commission command of “God and make disciples of all nations ... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ...” (Matt. 28:18-19), then you have to be a disciple-maker, which you cannot be unless you are a disciple yourself. If you really want Jesus to make you a “fisher of men” then you have to follow Him through discipleship process.

Discipleship has cost and benefits. If you’ve counted the cost and decided to go through with it do remember these two things. First, discipleship is a life-long process. Second, all the teachings and knowledge being imparted to you during the training are meant sharpen you to be useful in the ministry. The Bible says “Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7) Wisdom here is defined as good application of knowledge that is understood. Until you apply your spiritual knowledge, you are not spiritually wise.

To the Churches

Discipleship is not a new doctrine or teaching or invention. It is only a lost art, using the word of Leroy Eim in his book *“The lost Art of Disciple –making”*

Discipleship, like evangelism, has become a word so broadly among Christians that it has lost its true, biblical meaning. Although many things used being done can be linked to disciple making, there is real discipleship training used that must be well encouraged, financed monitored by each church. The church must not be in a hurry to train as many people but must lay emphasis on the correctness and thoroughness of the training. If the training is thorough the number will come in no time as the number will grow in geometric progression.

Discipleship is a basic functional duty of a church pastor. If there exist a director of discipleship training (or its equivalent) it should be an assistant to the pastor in that department. They must therefore work hand in hand and the work should not be left solely on the hand of the director.

To the Convention

The researcher will first like to commend the efforts of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in the provision of good materials of discipleship. Leaders guides are also provided. The recommendations to the leaders of the training are adequate to achieve desired goals. What is needed is to find a way that the recommendations will be thoroughly followed by leaders of the training in local churches. A simple recommendation that the researcher is making is the addition of two or three pages (as preface) to the leader's guide of various discipleship programmes. There it should be emphasized that as Jesus Christ is the real disciple-maker, they are stewards, and the Bible says, "And the Lord said, "who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season" (Luke 12:42) and

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”. (I Cor. 4:12)

Though the leaders may already know these, it will still do a lot of good if they are reminded at the commencement of each training programme.