

Discipleship not defined by technique, but by God working in a person's life

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Any number of methods can be employed to disciple youth, but leaders believe youth ministers can tell if their methods are working by evaluating whether their young people are following Christ and exhibiting the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Churches employ a variety of techniques to successfully help students grow in their faith, noted David Adams, [Texas Baptist discipleship](#) specialist. Some congregations focus their efforts on Sunday school. Others concentrate on small groups. One-on-one models are used. Some churches use a combination of approaches.

Each method has strengths and weaknesses, Adams said. As a result, the same discipleship technique that helps one person grow tremendously may not be as effective for another individual. The focus must be on helping people know Jesus and as a result, put biblical principles into practice in their daily lives.

"I don't know that there is a 'best way' to do discipleship," Adams said. "People are different, and people learn differently. What works for me might not work for you."

Texas Baptist youth ministry specialist Jane Wilson said a disciple is a learner.

"That word should describe a believer all the days of his life," she said. "When applied to a teenager, 'learner' is a very broad term, for he has had

fewer years in which to grow in his relationship with Christ."

Discipleship is ongoing, Adams said. Spiritual growth rarely is constant and continuous. According to James Fowler's stages of faith, one step is when an individual—often in young adulthood—reflects on the faith they learned from others and analyzes it independently. That stage can lead to a person taking ownership of what they believe, a move Adams believes is crucial.

"Discipleship is a process," said Randy Johnson, youth minister at [First Baptist Church in Richardson](#).

Johnson has been youth minister at the Richardson church 27 years and understands students can look great one moment and then disappoint the next. Still he never ceases to be amazed at what young people can do, he said.

Johnson believes discipleship includes an education process, in which students learn biblical concepts and disciplines of discipleship such as Bible study and prayer. It's also a practical process, where students learn by doing—putting into practice what they have learned.

No matter how one person discipiles another, Adams indicated, a mature disciple of Christ will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

Wilson affirmed Scripture provides a way for youth ministers to evaluate their discipleship efforts. Beyond Galatians 5, there are other passages that describe what a growing follower of Christ is like.

"To assess progress in discipleship, a student minister may look for progress in two basic areas of a teenager's life—having the mind of Christ as expressed in Philippians 2:5-8 (servanthood, unselfishness, humility) and walking as Christ walked, as noted in 1 John 2:6," she said.

Those characteristics only reveal themselves as a result of a person embracing a relationship with Christ and allowing him to work in his or her life, Adams said. That requires patience and belief that God will move in the lives of individuals.

"As a parent or a Sunday school teacher or a church staff member, you've got to trust God more than methods from the beginning."