

Praise for *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women*

If you've ever felt intimidated when a young woman asks if you will disciple her, read this book! In *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women*, Dana Yeakley has included everything you need to know when you say yes to the exciting opportunity of investing in the life of someone who wants to grow in her faith. You will learn how to be a disciple and how to take specific action steps to make disciples. This is a must-have resource!

CAROL KENT

Speaker and author of *Becoming a Woman of Influence*

Dana Yeakley's passion for discipleship is both inspiring and infectious. In her book *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women*, Dana provides a guide that removes the mystery from discipleship. Grounded in Scripture and supported by personal stories, this book will make you feel both encouraged and empowered to live out the command for every believer to "go and make disciples."

JENNI CATRON

Church leader and author of *The 4 Dimensions of Extraordinary Leadership*

Through the pages of this book, experienced discipler Dana Yeakley comes alongside those of us who want to disciple women but aren't sure how to start, whom to approach, what to do, or how to keep things on track to show us the way. This book is a great resource for any woman who wants a front row seat to see the Word of God bring change to the life of another woman.

NANCY GUTHRIE

Bible teacher and author of the *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament* Bible study series

In a culture where our identity is often focused on what we do, Dana places equal emphasis on being a mature disciple before we do anything for God. With a solid foundation of faith and security in our identity in Christ, we can confidently engage others with proper motivation and intentionally colabor with God in the gentle art of discipling.

KIMBERLY MATTHISEN

Alongside Women and National Leadership Team, Navigators of Canada

Dana's book is full of important, life-giving lessons on both being a disciple and leading others in purposeful discipleship relationships. A great tool for every woman who takes Jesus' call to "go and make disciples" seriously.

JESSIE MINASSIAN

Resident "big sis" at LifeLoveandGod.com and author of *Unashamed*



THE GENTLE

art of discipling women



THE GENTLE
ART OF
discipling
WOMEN

NURTURING AUTHENTIC FAITH
IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS

DANA YEAKLEY

NAVPRESS 

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The Gentle Art of Discipling Women: Nurturing Authentic Faith in Ourselves and Others

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*To my mom and her mom, Mammau, who modeled a life
of faith and prayer and passed their love for Jesus on to me.*



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Introduction



DESIGNED FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Emily fidgeted with her coffee cup. Marcia was running late. They'd gotten to know each other a little at church. Emily, though honored, had been taken aback when Marcia, a new Christian, had asked Emily to disciple her. She had stammered out a yes without thinking and now was wondering what exactly she'd gotten herself into. Emily was a Christian—had been following Jesus for years—and of course she knew she was *supposed* to be discipling people. Something within her longed to help Marcia grow. But now, in the midst of this busy coffee shop, her coffee going cold and her mind going blank, she felt utterly inadequate. Marcia was looking for her to do something, but Emily had no idea where to start.

Have you ever felt this way? Maybe you haven't thought of it in terms of the word *discipleship*, but perhaps someone has asked you to help her grow, or simply has looked to you for guidance in her relationship with Christ—and you feel ill-equipped to do whatever this “discipling” thing is supposed to be.

What do you think when you hear the word *discipleship*? A lot of us might look at Jesus' command in Matthew 28 to “go and make disciples of all nations,” and we nod our heads. But when we get down to it, the actual “going and making disciples” part can feel intimidating, insurmountable, or simply confusing.

Even though we want to—and in fact are designed—to disciple others, we let our confusion and lack of information hold us hostage. Later in this book we will get to Jesus' definition of *discipleship*—our most important guide for discipling—but to get started, let's consider the dictionary definition Daniel Webster gives us: “Someone who accepts and helps to spread the teachings of a famous person.”¹ Webster nails it! Indeed, discipleship means accepting and helping to spread the words of Jesus. Could it really be that simple?

Yes, discipling another woman is a doable task. Throughout this book, I want to walk alongside you, encouraging you to find your God-given ability to disciple another woman in your life. I'll be with you in spirit as you uncover the assurance and freedom God offers each of His daughters who want to follow Him in obedience into this gentle art of discipling women.

WHY “GENTLE”?

The LORD and King is coming with power.
He rules with a powerful arm.
He has set his people free.
He is bringing them back as his reward.
He has won the battle over their enemies.
He takes care of his flock like a shepherd.
He gathers the lambs in his arms.
He carries them close to his heart.
He gently leads those that have little ones.

ISAIAH 40:10-11

Isaiah 40:10 shows us a bold and compelling description of our almighty God—and in the very next verse, this same God is described as a protective shepherd who gently gathers lambs in His arms. If we wish to disciple other women, we need that powerful ruler supernaturally surrounding us and filling us—but we can also be thankful knowing that He attends us and those we help as a gentle shepherd. We can gently disciple others with His omnipotent pastoral care and support.

As our gentle shepherd, Jesus “gently leads those that have little ones” (v. 11). When I read this, I picture a young mother holding her newborn. There is never a more vulnerable time for mother or baby than the first days or weeks of the little one’s life! I remember the vulnerability I felt as I raised my

three children, and more recently I have watched the empathetic care of my daughters for their children. As women, we have been created with that sensitivity and vulnerability whether we have had children or not.

Biologically, there are hormones every woman needs: estrogen, oxytocin, and progesterone. Sometimes I refer to these hormones as “drugs” that we have been placed on so that we can do what we are created to do! We have all experienced the side effects of these “drugs” when we experience PMS, but these hormones also give us wonderful capabilities. We are able to sense what people—whether our friends, husbands, or children—need. We can quickly tell how someone else feels. Sometimes it seems as though we have eyes in the back of our heads!

This nurturing quality we possess within our feminine design is our greatest resource as we respond to Christ’s call to make disciples. Disciplers are nourishers. They are sensitive. They are relationally aware. They give attention to the spiritual dietary needs of those they help. They place themselves in a position of vulnerability for the sake of those they help. And because Jesus gently cares for us and leads us, we are compelled to gently disciple others.

I am thankful for the gentleness that Jesus has continued to show me throughout my life as I have walked with Him. And how important it is that we offer gentleness as we disciple! This gentleness does not mean that we are indifferent to the damaging life choices or attitudes of those around us. Nor does it mean that we endorse the pervasive victim mentalities

present in our culture today that paralyze a woman's growth. But in gentleness, we should show deliberate voluntary kindness and forbearance as we conduct ourselves as disciplers.

WHY AN "ART"?

Like art, discipling requires a certain level of skill development. The application of those skills, along with creative acumen, brings discipling to a level of artistry. As artists, we envision the beautiful results of what is being crafted, plan for the results, and contribute to their end. We are fully present with the emerging work of beauty in front of us, even as we work with the finished product constantly in mind. Being flexible and creative as we use the skills we have developed is essential as we trust God for His desired outcome in a woman's life.

As we intentionally develop our skills, we grow in our ability to disciple with confident thoroughness. Relying upon God's Spirit helps us cultivate an awareness of the needs of those we help. And while we are "at work" in a person's life, the ultimate Artist, the Creator of the universe, is accomplishing the true work! God is far more in tune and active with those we are discipling than we could ever hope to be.

LORD, you have seen what is in my heart.

You know all about me.

You know when I sit down and when I get up.

You know what I'm thinking even though
you are far away.

You know when I go out to work
and when I come back home.
You know exactly how I live.
LORD, even before I speak a word,
you know all about it.

You are all around me, behind me and in front of me.
You hold me safe in your hand.
I'm amazed at how well you know me.
It's more than I can understand.

PSALM 139:1-6

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Today, if we want to grow in Christ, women have so many options! The Sunday morning worship service, Sunday school for adults, Tuesday or Wednesday morning or evening Bible study, the Christmas evangelistic brunch, perhaps a fall or spring retreat, conferences . . . the list goes on.

In my twenties and thirties, I was always involved in women's groups at church. I loved the camaraderie these communities provided as I began raising kids, hunkering down in the marriage relationship, and figuring out what it meant to be a godly woman. The friends I made during these years were priceless and necessary.

But during those years I was especially helped in my growth through a one-on-one discipleship relationship with a woman ten years older than me. She helped me in my

personal walk with God, in my understanding of the Word, and in my conviction that I needed to help others know Christ and make Him known. This one-on-one discipleship attention influenced my life choices and helped me make sense of all the other input I was receiving from the pulpit, conference speakers, and Christian friends in Bible study and other groups I attended.

The Gentle Art of Discipling Women was written to help women who want to disciple another woman one-on-one. Remember Emily at the beginning of this chapter? If you're like Emily, desiring to disciple someone but unsure where to begin, I would recommend that you go through this book on your own, asking yourself, "Am I grounded in Christ?" and "How do I disciple someone else?" This book will equip the mature Christian who wants to disciple another—but it will also be of help to the woman who wishes to be disciplined! If you're like Marcia, desiring to be disciplined, you could pick up this book and ask a trusted and respected fellow believer, "Could we read this book together? Can you help me grow as we do so?"

This book can also be used with a small group. Perhaps you have several friends who are full of life and would be great at discipling others. Take a risk and invite them to study this book together. There is a short leader's guide in the back of this book that will give you guidance and confidence to guide others along this journey with you. Walking together through both sections of this book will give all of you a chance to talk about your strengths and weaknesses as His

disciple and to encourage one another as you step out to disciple others. Understanding that we are all in this together is important as we think through the possibilities of discipling! Be encouraged by Psalm 68:11: “The Lord announces the word, and the women who proclaim it are a mighty throng” (NIV). Come join the mighty throng and take up the challenge of discipling others!

Do you remember our simple dictionary definition of *discipleship*? Discipleship means accepting and helping to spread the words of Jesus. Both pieces are critical as we step into discipling another woman. So this book is divided into two parts: “Be His Disciple” and “Make a Disciple.”

Part 1 is vital: *being* one who authentically follows Christ must always precede stepping out and building into someone else’s life. So, in this first section, we will forthrightly consider our own foundation—what we as Jesus’ disciples need for our own spiritual health as we walk with Him. These things are our birthright as His daughters!

Take your time to work through the stories, Scripture, and questions in this section. Studying Scripture is a crucial part of both your individual walk with Christ and your journey alongside someone else. Throughout this book, we will dive into Scripture to help us understand key truths about our position in Christ as a disciple and how we are to disciple others. Use a journal to reflect on the questions about Scripture and record your thoughts. The questions are designed to be worked through as you go through each chapter, and you may wish to take a week to go through each

chapter to adequately dig into the questions. This part of the book is intended to help you personally, and it can also serve as a powerful study tool with which you can disciple another woman in her understanding of who she is in Christ. I pray that God uses it mightily in your own faith so you may be confident as you set out to disciple others.

Part 2 calls us to boldly consider and step into the broad scope of what it means to be a disciplemaker. We will look at Jesus as our master disciplemaker. We will consider advice on making disciples as we look at the Word as our backdrop. As we work through the Scripture, questions, and challenges together, you will feel empowered and encouraged, understanding that God has given you all you need to disciple others!

God's heart is that we would join Him in the lofty mission of bringing others to Himself and discipling them so that they might go and do the same. As we consider joining Christ's commission upon our lives, let us humbly lean upon Him because He promises to be with us and gently lead us. Step with me into the magnificent challenge of impacting our world through investing in another person!²

❖ PART ONE ❖

Be His Disciple

I DON'T CARE who tries to convince us that there are simple formulas for a happy life—life is not easy. If someone says that knowing Christ means painless living, then they are passing on an enormous lie. But do you know what Jesus does promise us? “I have come so they may have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way” (John 10:10).

The word Jesus used for *life* in this verse is translated from the Greek word *zoe*:

Zoe is distinguished from *bios* (*Strong's*, 979) which refers to physical life or livelihood. Having *bios* allows us to be physically alive, that is to exist. *Zoe* (*Strong's*, 2222) is the nobler word of the two, expressing all of the highest and best which Christ is and which He gives to the saints. *Zoe* is the highest blessedness of the creature.³

We all possess *bios*, but some of us may not be experiencing or living out of the wealth of *zoe*, the life that Christ gives us. Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was not only to die for our sins but to open the way to a life that is full and meaningful. As we examine our foundation of faith in this section, consider: Are we living abundantly, in living color, as Jesus intends—or are we just existing as in a dull black-and-white photo? Are we truly living, or just existing?

FOUNDATION

In these first four chapters, we will spend time digging into four foundational realities of our faith:

- *We Are Forgiven*
- *We Are Safe*
- *We Have Access*
- *We Are Becoming*

These realities are for every follower of Christ, and incredibly important for those of us who want to take up the gentle art of discipling women. As we consider discipling, we need to be assured of our place as His disciple so we pass on that which we know to be true. These four realities flow from the truth of the Word of God and center on the promises we have in Christ. Living in these realities cultivates an authentic faith that will underscore every part of our lives—and will undergird us as we gently offer help and growth to those we disciple.

We Are Forgiven: Knowing that we are forgiven is crucial to a genuine faith, because without knowing the eternal and daily reality of God's forgiveness, we tend to live out a self-serving vacuous existence even as we call ourselves "Christian." Our lives will not center on Christ and joyful obedience to His Word but will merely give Him a compartment or two, allowing us to pretend we're following Christ. When we truly embrace and hinge all that we do on the sacrificial forgiveness of God, then we begin to acknowledge daily how spiritually destitute we are apart from Him. Having this reality firmly established in our hearts will launch us into an ability to care and lead another as we disciple them.

We Are Safe: Do you know that you are safe in Christ? Only when we embrace this reality can we walk with Him day by day free from anxiety. Our media-driven world can create fear and panic; it is vital to understand that though we are vulnerable, we are shielded in Christ. As we comprehend this, we can live out of His protection. And from there we bring our strength and conviction to the discipling table. Genuine faith rests upon our consciousness that we are safe because of the trustworthiness of our God, who not only created us but has arranged for us an eternal home.

We Have Access: Most of us live inside stressful, active, overwhelming schedules, under the burden of a myriad of

expectations. Cultivating intimacy with Christ is imperative. In the protection of our daily connection to Him, we can not only survive but thrive above the cacophony that surrounds us. As we set out to disciple other women, this reality will extend blessing into the lives of those we help.

We Are Becoming: The truth that “we are becoming” impacts how we perceive every circumstance of our lives. Christ makes no mistakes. We are the work in progress of a loving God, and He intends to complete His work in us. The abundant life that Jesus promises involves His personal and loving invasion into our spirits as He matures our character to wholly reflect Himself. As we come alongside another woman, we will have empathy and understanding for her life circumstances and relationships—because we are also in the process of becoming.

The pursuit of a genuine faith requires that we, with vulnerability and honesty, open ourselves to Christ, anticipating growth that takes us out of our comfort zone. And as we engage in this study with other women, we have the opportunity to encourage and challenge one another on the journey.

❖ PART TWO ❖

Make a Disciple

WHEN I FIRST ENGAGED in discipling women one-on-one, I always had to work through my own sense of inadequacy. I still feel a variety of misgivings to this day.

- Am I giving her what God says she needs? Or what she wants? Or what I want?
- Am I loving her and relating to her in the way God wants me to? And in a way that is helpful in each of our capacities and seasons of life?
- Am I aware of her struggles, concerns, fears, and hopes?
- Did I bring enough structure, enough relationship, enough prayer, enough of the Word when I met with her today? Did I talk too much?
- She didn't seem excited. What about her lack of interest?

- What about keeping track of what we have talked about and what she asked me to pray for?
- Am I praying enough for her?

Up until this point in our study of the gentle art of discipling women, we've been reminding ourselves of who we are in Jesus Christ for a very important reason: because only when we are secure in our relationship with Him can we truly find our footing as a discipler of women. We must answer this question: "Am I stepping into a God-ordained, God-empowered supernatural activity?" If we are—and indeed we are!—then we can rest in the One who will carry us as we disciple another woman. When we lose sight of this core truth about discipling, we will quickly turn and focus on our many inadequacies—and they will explode in our hearts and minds like shrapnel from a land mine.

We need to remember four distinct truths if we want to disciple women:

1. Making disciples is not a human idea. It is God's idea. When Jesus gathered His eleven disciples together after His resurrection and prior to His ascension, He appointed them to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). What amazing parting words! Along with those followers we have been especially invited into what God is already doing in the lives of women as we seek to disciple them.

2. At the core of discipling is a supernatural attachment. God involves Himself within the heart and life of the one we disciple. Remember our Webster definition of *discipleship* in the introduction of this book? Though helpful, it misses this crucial aspect of the discipling relationship. The Greek word Jesus used when He said, “Go and make disciples” is *matheteuo*. *Matheteuo* must be distinguished from the verb *matheo*, which was a common Greek word of the day. The word *matheo*, which is not found in the New Testament, means to solely learn without any attachment to the teacher who teaches. *Matheteuo*, by contrast, means not only to learn but to *become attached* to one’s teacher and become his follower in doctrine and conduct of life.¹⁴ For me, this word *matheteuo* completely separates discipling from any other mode of schooling or training. In college our professors practiced *matheo* with us. They were teachers who taught us, but they did not want (nor did we want) any “attachment” to them. As disciplers, however, we have the goal of attachment as we gently engage with those we help.

So are we saying we want those we disciple to attach to *us*? Absolutely not! As we build a relationship and invest in someone it is not uncommon that some *might* subtly attach to us, and we need to be wary of letting that happen. Amy Carmichael, missionary to India for fifty-five years, knew this tendency: “If I slip into the place that can be filled by Christ alone,

making myself the first necessity to a soul instead of leading it to fasten upon Him, then I know nothing of Calvary love.”¹⁵ We desire the one we disciple to attach to the One we are both following: Jesus! Our role as discipler is to breed healthy attachment to Jesus.

3. As disciplers we are collaborators with God. We must correctly view ourselves this way when we disciple someone. Discipling another is never about us. In 1 Corinthians 3:3-9 Paul admonished those of the Corinthian church who distinguished themselves as followers of Paul or Apollos—because, though Paul and Apollos labored among the people of that church, it was God who made them grow.

This mentality should affect everything about my engagement as a discipler. For example, I must ally myself with God through prayer as I discern what I should be sharing with someone. I should not share only that which has changed my life (though there is a place for that). Even as I continue to meet with someone over a period of time, I must remain in alliance with God over their needs and growth, for it is God who makes them grow! This reality of discipling another frees me up in so many ways.

4. Making the choice to disciple women is a matter of obedience. Christ’s words to His followers in Matthew 28:18-20 are not a suggestion. He is about to leave

them—and His words are brimming with insight into His vision for reaching the nations. He promises His authority and presence to those who carry out this command. As His daughter I want to obey Him. The beauty of this is that Jesus has not asked us to obey Him and do something without His complete assistance. As we obey Him we grow in the realization that His invitation is not to an impossible task but to a way of life!

WHAT DOES MAKING DISCIPLES LOOK LIKE?

A lot of times we use interchangeable terms for discipling like *mentoring*, *life coaching*, going to a *spiritual director*, or *counseling*. But discipling differs from these other relationships in some key ways. The main difference is wrapped up in the purpose and objective for the relationship.

Mentoring can mean a lot of things: all the way from helping someone to learn to cook, organize their home, raise kids, or play golf!

Life coaching typically involves focused help in career or personal challenges.

Going to a **spiritual director** involves self-focused interaction as one encounters the divine. A spiritual director usually charges an hourly fee.

Counseling targets certain aspects of one's personal, social, or psychological needs. A counselor also usually charges an hourly fee.

But as we disciple, our primary purpose is to come alongside the one we are discipling and intentionally build into her life as we share life, prayer, and His Word. Disciplemaking also includes the hope that the one we disciple also will eventually disciple someone else. Paul gave us this intentional vision in 2 Timothy 2:2: “You have heard me teach in front of many witnesses. Pass on to people you can trust the things you’ve heard me say. Then they will be able to teach others also.”

Discipling is not a job we are hired to do or make money from. The choice to disciple others flows from our relationship with Jesus. This is where the true riches of the relationship come from. Matthew 10:8 offers us the posture we are to maintain as we disciple someone: “You have received freely, so give freely.”

We have the opportunity to be generous from our heart as we disciple those God brings to us.

AM I QUALIFIED TO DISCIPLE?

A lot of us think of the following passage from the book of Titus when it comes to the idea of discipling women:

Teach the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers. Instead, they should teach others what is good. These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children,

to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes,
to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands.
Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.

TITUS 2:3-5, NLT

But what does it really mean to be an older woman? During the time of Jesus, the average life span of a woman was thirty-four years. So, then, who might be considered “older women” today? Every woman, no matter what her age, who is just barely a step ahead of another woman in her walk with Christ is an “older woman” and has the raw material to help another grow. Chances are that describes you! Know that God has already given you everything you need as you step into this art of discipling another woman.

GETTING PRACTICAL

Every artist needs to achieve excellence in the use of tools and skills required for their art—and since discipling is an art, we need the proper tools and to develop the skills of our craft! In this second half of the book, we’re going to dig into some practical questions about the discipling relationship, concentrating on the needed skills and practices of discipling:

- How do we create a life-giving atmosphere?
- Whom do we help?
- What do we share?
- How does discipling one-on-one actually work?

As we answer these questions, let us not forget that making disciples is always God's idea! We are being responsive to His command and will be completely supported and empowered by Him.

I pray that as we disciple, we would see the hand of God on the relationships He gives us. May He be glorified in our hearts and the hearts of those we disciple, and may those we help discover the joyous call to also go and disciple others!