

Advanced Discipleship Training

Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Growth & Maturity

Advanced Discipleship Training (ADT) Overview

There is a fresh interest in the church today for Christian Discipleship. Many churches and denominations started to realize that there is a need for *spiritual formation*; therefore some churches increase their budgets and staff for this purpose. Since I love discipleship, this is music to my ears and it makes my heart beat faster.

I am a beginner in the area of spiritual formation and I am still learning. Approximately fifteen years ago, God inspired me to take discipleship seriously. At that time, I knew almost nothing about spiritual formation. I just responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit and His calling in this area. I named this work – *Spiritual Growth and Maturity (SG&M)*. You could call it the way you feel comfortable: *Christian Discipleship, Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Growth and Maturity, or the Process of Sanctification*. All of these terms, in one way or another, describe *the process of being conformed into the image of Christ*; this is why the Church is here on earth – **to make disciples not mere converts**. The Church is primarily called to facilitate an environment where the Holy Spirit could spiritually form new people into the glorious image of Jesus Christ. The Church is called for ***The Ultimate Intention***.¹

Yes, there is a fresh interest for spiritual growth and maturity, and I am glad for it, but there is so much to do and it appears that we are running out of time. Most Christian leaders agree that there is a lack of biblical discipleship in the church today. Most churches focus on evangelism but forget almost entirely about discipleship. Eventually they win some converts but fall short of the Great Commission's requirement of making disciples not just converts. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, the renowned author and promoter of spiritual formation, Dallas Willard, states that "Non-discipleship is the elephant of the church." It appears that we, the 21st century church, have missed the real meaning of discipleship. In the New Testament era, when Jesus said "*make disciples*," the apostles understood that Christ's intent was not simply getting someone to believe in Him (convert them), but to help those believers become what Jesus intended them to be (disciple them). In an article titled, *The Discipleship Challenge*, Winfield Bevis writes, "Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to discipleship is that churches have become complicated and over programmed." The church became its own worst enemy and the biggest obstacle against making disciples. In other words – *we do not make disciples because we are too busy with our own programs*.

In a nutshell, this is the main purpose and the highest objective of Upper Room Fellowship Ministry.² That is – to provide the *environment*, the *tools*, and the *teaching* through the ***Advanced Discipleship Training (ADT)*** so that the Christian discipleship and spiritual growth and maturity process could take place in the lives of interested individuals. The Church today is full of converts, but so few of them are truly disciples of Christ. We must pray and get out of our comfort zones – **be *discipled*** and **make *disciples***. We should treat ***The Great Commission*** found in Matthew 28:19-20 literally and not transform it into ***The Great Omission***.³

¹ See ***The Ultimate Intention*** section of this manual

² See the ***Mission Statement*** of URFM section of this manual

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According to the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, “A convert is someone who changes from one faith to another.” I can humbly share with you that there is a clear difference between being a convert to Christianity and a disciple of Jesus Christ. **People can change their faith but only God, through the Holy Spirit, by the Word of God can change the heart.** Just by attending a specific church of a particular denomination does not make me a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the same way with a bike; it is not going to become a car just by being parked in a garage. **This is a cheap grace that costs us nothing.** Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the author of *The Cost of Discipleship*, first defined cheap grace, “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”⁴ Please try to pay attention to these staggering statistics: the church in America is comprised of “many converts, but shockingly few disciples.”⁵ Additionally, only 25% of Evangelicals meet the biblical standard for a disciple.⁶ Isn’t this sobering?

Regardless of what you read so far, I want to ask you a few penetrating questions from heart to heart: *Are you hungry for the Word of God? Do you feel that you have not grown spiritually for the last several years? Are you ready to pay the price and let the Holy Spirit make you and mold you more and more into the likeness of Christ? Do you want to follow in the footsteps of those who followed Jesus? Do you really desire to become all that God intends for you? Are you passionate to let Christ make a difference in you and around you?* If your answer is “**Yes!**” to one or more of these questions, you are the perfect candidate, the perfect *mathetes*⁷ for the **Advanced Discipleship Training** offered by URFM.

Welcome aboard! Whoever you are, I am glad to have you in this class and part of this amazing and life-transforming opportunity. Let’s have a nice journey together with others who are hungry for the Word of God. God bless your decision!

With LOVE in HIS Service,

Valy Vadura

Life Coach/Author/Spiritual Mentor

³ *The Great Omission*, (Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship), (256 pages, hardcover, Harper San Francisco), is the title of a book written by Dallas Willard to raise the attention about the Church’s lack of discipleship. “The last command Jesus gave the church before he ascended to heaven was the **Great Commission**, the call for Christians to “make disciples of all the nations.” But Christians have responded by making “Christians,” not “disciples.” This has been the church’s Great Omission.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. trans. R.H. Fuller, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 45.

⁵ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*. (This conclusion is based upon two years of research Barna conducted regarding the current state of discipleship and how churches can enhance the effectiveness of their discipleship ministries.)

⁶ Bill Hull, *Disciple Making Pastor*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 55.

⁷ The Greek word *mathetes* (translated disciple) is found more than 250 times in the New Testament and means apprentice, learner, or pupil. However, according to Greek Bible scholar Spiros Zodhiates, editor of the Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, *mathetes* “means more than mere pupil or learner. It means an adherer who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct.”