



# The Structure of the Curriculum

The Disciple Curriculum is based on a three-pronged system of Bible training that we believe provides a well-rounded, gospel-centered education in Scripture. We believe that Bible training should include the following three aspects.

## 1. The "Grand Story"

Theologians call it "redemptive history." It's the big picture of what God is doing not only in Scripture, but in history even now. The Bible tells us that this story has been planned since "before the creation of the world" and is being perfectly executed by the One who planned it and then created the world for it. Here's the story in a nutshell:

God, who made all things, created man to be his representative on earth. He gave man the honor of authority in creation and bestowed upon him the very image of himself as one who is able to create through the power of language, able to reason and feel, able to establish spiritual, emotional, covenantal fellowship with others. Why did God make all things and man in particular? For a single reason: to reveal his glory and, in turn, to be glorified by the ones he had made.

But man betrayed this honor by disobeying God in the Garden of Eden where he was first created. Man sought his own glory above God's. So God removed man from his own presence, punished him by frustrating his work, and forbid access to the tree of life. Death came through Adam into the creation to which God had given life.

Because of Adam's sin, all who followed in his line (the whole human race as well as creation itself) were plagued by sin and death and fatal distance from the Life-Giver. But God continued his faithful provision through the people of Israel by revealing himself to them and dwelling with them. He continued to provide air and water and food for his creation. He faithfully preserved what he had made because he was not through with his plan. From eternity, he had determined to reveal his glory even more fully than it had been revealed through the creation.

God entered his own creation as an Israelite, as Jesus Christ, whose perfect life and sacrificial death provided the "exact representation" of God's full glory. He was the "true light" and the "life of men." All that had happened up

to Christ was intended to prepare for and point to Christ. Many did not recognize him as God, as the redeemer which mankind had needed since the Garden of Eden. But those who believed that he was the redeemer are giving new life, born again into the family line of Christ, and heirs of the new creation to come.

This new creation is being made even now. Those who are born again are "new creations," being transformed each day in their minds, emotions, attitudes, and habits. Mankind as a whole has been gloriously rebuilt into one new nation, the Church. And the Church waits daily for the return of Christ, who will at that time create a new heavens and a new earth in which his holy people will live forever, eating freely from the tree of life.

This is the "grand story" from start to finish. You can see that we haven't in reality reached the end yet! But we are near to it. The way that we read and teach and proclaim the Bible **MUST** center on this gospel story, or we are no better off reading the Bible than we would be reading any other collection of wise sayings or moral codes.

One of the main goals of the Disciple Curriculum (and one of the features that distinguishes it from other Bible curricula) is to emphasize this story of redemption. We believe that the human mind and spirit are designed specifically by God to understand, receive and intuitively "get" truth when it is packaged in story form. God designed us this way because of the way he knew he planned to reveal himself-- through a story.

If we are to be faithful to the educational agenda of our reigning King, we must be oriented to teach GOSPEL and not simply BIBLE. Of course, the gospel comes to us through the Bible, so in teaching GOSPEL we must prioritize Scripture as the primary text of their education. But there are lots of people out there studying "Bible" who have no interest at all in the gospel or in its power to create life inside of dead souls. Therefore, our end purpose is not to train little Bible scholars, but to "make disciples" of Christ through knowledge of the gospel (as it comes to us through Scripture.) A person's knowledge of Scripture has value only inasmuch as it leads to faith and repentance and new life.

### **How does the Disciple Curriculum teach the grand GOSPEL story?**

To study the story of redemption, students will:

- Memorize extensive Scriptures which tell the story from Genesis to Revelation using the "creation" language. Using music to learn the passages, the students are able to learn up to 12 verses per week without much effort.
- Read the Biblical texts that tell the smaller stories which make up the larger story.
- Learn the redemptive story in 5 parts using the literary device of a story line. Students practice summarizing the entire story in a few sentences, as well as

sequencing the events of parts of the story. The story line also helps the students to see how God's plans over thousands of years come together in Christ and how our knowledge of him is shaped by the part of the story in which we live.

- Tell the story in several different ways, including summarizing (orally and in writing), reading and illustrating the story using a "story book" that even small children can understand, and with visual aids.

## 2. Theology

Theology, simply put, is what you believe to be true about God. And, since what you believe about God determines your thinking about man, sin, Christ, the Bible, the Church, history, and creation, theology is also what you think about these things.

The Bible is our source for these beliefs, yet the Bible is not, by God's providence, constructed as a book of systematic theology. The gospel comes to us in the Bible primarily as a story--a true and living story--in books like Genesis, Exodus, 1 Samuel, Esther, Matthew, John, Acts, and Revelation, or as commentaries on the meaning or application of the story, in books such as Deuteronomy, the Psalms, the prophetic books, Romans, 1 Timothy, or James.

Most of the Bible was written by ancient men whose cultures were oriented to learning through story much more than ours is. In our Greek-based educational modes, we like things to be systematized, laid out in outlines, progressing logically from point to point. But the Bible doesn't teach truth this way, usually. So we have to learn to read the stories with ancient minds, minds that believe that the stories are true, that they are truer in fact than a raw logical assertion might be.

Our theology, therefore, must be derived from having made sense of the story. In other words, God has chosen to reveal his nature and will through the events of history in the setting of his creation. If we hope to know God, we must be well aware not only of what he has made and done, but also what those creations and actions were intended by God to teach us about himself (and this is where the non-story commentaries of King David, Isaiah, John, Peter, and Paul, and others are so necessary). We don't make our own interpretations of God's activity in the affairs of this world, we must let God himself tell us what he meant by them.

On this foundation, then, we can begin to construct a system of theology, that is, a consistent way of thinking about things that doesn't self-contradict, and that is in line with what is revealed in Scripture. The important thing is to end here, though, and not to begin here. We don't form our theology from every wind of teaching that has come our way and then go to the Bible to prove that theology. Instead, we must begin as disciples of Scripture and learn in the way Scripture requires us to learn (through story) and, having encountered the gospel story, then go to form what seems true about God from what he has done and said.

One word of caution, however: we are not implying that each person is free to make his or her own interpretations or draw his or her own "personal" conclusions from the gospel as a story. Some people hear "story" and get all warm and fuzzy. Stories, in the modern mind, are relative and subject to "reader response." They are fair game for any person's imagination and speculation. This is not our view on how the gospel story is meant to be handled. The Church has, since the time of the apostles, struggled to articulate theological truth and doctrine, sometimes at the cost of Christian lives. We believe that as much as we can, we should accept the biblical articulation of truth as it has been passed down through creeds and confessions. Articulating it again in our own language and popularly understood phrases is, of course, proper, but the doctrines themselves--the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the fact of resurrection, the doctrines of grace--are not to be reinvented in every generation. God tells his story to reveal his one true nature and purpose--we are not free to make of it whatever we want. It must be handled reverently in search of the one truth which God intends.

### **How does the Disciple Curriculum teach Theology?**

We have designed the Disciple Curriculum to be theologically very rich. Although we do hope that Christians from many denominations will find the curriculum useful for teaching Scripture, we have opted not to make it theologically "neutral" because we do not believe that the Bible itself is theologically neutral. The fact that the Church is divided into denominations is a result of our own inability to understand or accept what Scripture says, not of diversity or contradiction in the truth itself. The curriculum emphasizes the gospel, which every true believer will recognize immediately, and memorization of biblical passages. We trust that the Word will do its own work in transforming all of us to its standard. So much time is spent directly consuming the Word of God in the Disciple Curriculum, that if some have differences with our theological applications, they will be stimulated nevertheless to confront the gospel story in the text and figure out for themselves why they believe what they believe. Unity--the all-important goal of the Church (Ephesians 4)--is achieved not through neutralizing the truth but through confronting it headlong together. We have designed the studies to provide starting places for dialogue in your personal Bible study, between spouses, at family meals, in your own local church. We believe that God will reveal himself to his people through his Word, and have incorporated orthodox Christian theology into the study of his Word in the following ways:

- Students memorize and study the Bible passage itself as it relates to the overall gospel story to provide a common foundation for discussion before confronting theological questions. NOTE: The passages memorized in Year 1: The Creator are not chosen as proof texts for each doctrine that is taught alongside them. Instead, they are chosen for their contribution to helping us understand the gospel story, and we have chosen one basic Christian doctrine to illuminate in light of each memory passage in order to familiarize children with these standard biblical doctrines. In later years of study, Disciple Curriculum students will study theological statements by surveying proof texts to see how they are expressed in

- various ways through various voices in Scripture.
- We use Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology in writing the curriculum because we find his articulation of doctrine to be clear, humble, and overall very accurate. His comments clarify the issues surrounding the doctrines and, at the very least, get readers started on a course towards seeking the truth, even where they may disagree with him.
  - The doctrines chosen in Year 1: The Creator study cover the majority of basic Christian beliefs and provide a foundation for future studies. See Theology Lessons Book 1 for a description of the theology lessons in The Creator.
  - Students discuss what the doctrine does not mean as well as what it does mean
  - Students practice "apologetics" after memorizing and studying the passage, learning about the theological truth that becomes evident through the passage, and answering "false statements" or half-truths about the doctrine. For example, students learning that "God's word reveals who God is" may have to tell what is wrong with the statement, "The Bible is too hard to understand. I like to learn about God just by sitting in the mountains and looking at all the beauty." The students, after studying the doctrine in various ways, must answer something like, "Well, God does reveal his glory in creation, but we can't know about him by only observing creation. We need his word to tell us who he is, and we need his word to tell us how we can know him through Christ."

### 3. Bible Literacy

Bible Literacy has two components: knowing the CONTENT of the Bible and knowing the LANGUAGE of the Bible.

#### CONTENT

Just knowing the Bible's content so you can win at Bible Trivia has little everlasting virtue; there are Ph.D. students who know far more about the family line of David or the archaeology of the Holy Land than you or I could ever hope to learn, but many of them do not accept the authority of Scripture, the Lordship of Christ, or the Bible's reason for human existence: to glorify God, not man.

Yet there is value in knowing your Bible facts. The deeper you attempt to understand the gospel, the more you will find that ignorance about details can get in the way. Therefore, as part of a well-rounded Bible training, we believe that disciples of Christ (who are therefore students of the Bible) must devote some attention to learning the names, places, events, terms, and smaller stories contained in the Bible. Knowledge of the original audience to which Bible books are written is also useful.

Knowing the content of the Bible also involves learning the structure which contains that content. The better you know where to find the books, key passages, and individual verses that pertain to the study you're doing, and the faster you can turn there, the less impeded your study will be by the lack of this knowledge.

## LANGUAGE

Because the Bible is a book certain language skills can help to make Bible study easier and at the same time more productive. Obviously, the better reader you are in general, the more you will get out of your Bible specifically. One of the greatest triumphs of Satan in our schools is the decreasing ability of students to read and think about what they are reading (in other words, even many students who are able to read are unable to read intelligently.)

So, as Christians we must make literacy a priority. A very good book to read is *How to Read A Book* by Mortimer J. Adler. Adler doesn't write from a Christian perspective or with Christian motives, but his arguments are valid for Christians nonetheless.

In addition to being able to read intelligently, our kids must be taught to read the Bible intelligently. The Bible is a complicated book, compiled over many centuries by many authors in many various settings to many various types of audiences. And it comes to us in translation, too, which compounds the difficulty. Therefore, we must assume that our children will need specific instruction in how to read their Bibles-- just teaching them phonics and reading comprehension with *The Cat in the Hat* and chapter books will not suffice.

The Jews believed that any translation of the Torah was not truly the Torah. Therefore, in their "kindergarten" equivalent they began right off the bat teaching the children to read and understand Hebrew so that they could study the "true" Torah. The Church is, on the other hand, a global priesthood, and at Pentecost God revealed that he had the power and authority to spread the gospel in every tongue to every nation. Therefore, translations are a part of our experience in reading the Bible as Gentiles. We do not believe that there is spiritual merit in learning Hebrew, the way the Jews did, but we do believe that the more children can bridge the language barrier between themselves and the original text of the Hebrew scrolls, the more they will understand the nuances and patterns of thought in Scripture.

### **How does the Disciple Curriculum teach Bible Literacy?**

In the Disciple Curriculum, we attempt to teach children to be biblically literate by having them do the following types of activities:

## CONTENT

- memorizing the books of the Bible
- learning the stories of the Bible
- constructing time lines and making connections between Bible names and events
- being familiar with the geography of the settings of Bible stories
- memorizing the references for key gospel passages (such as "Genesis 1 tells about

when God made the earth" or "John 3 tells about Jesus telling Nicodemus that you must be born again.")

- connecting passages with other passages that are related (cross-referencing)
- writing about themes which arise in Bible stories

## LANGUAGE

- memorizing Scripture in order to internalize the sound and structure of the Bible's language (as it comes to us through an accurate and reliable translation)
- reading Scripture regularly, with the purpose of listening and comprehending
- studying structure and vocabulary in Bible verses/passages
- learning key words in Hebrew/Greek, and learning to read and write basic Hebrew/Greek sentences for the purpose of increasing students' awareness of the translation gap
- copying portions of Scripture to increase sensitivity to wording and phrasing
- summarizing passages (we believe that summarizing orally or in writing is a powerful way to solidify knowledge)