

So You Want to Be a Sponsor?

(or you want to know what it entails)

Matthew 28:18–20 (NLT)

¹⁸Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹Therefore, go and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Jesus’ command is clear: **make disciples**. But discipling is not a solo sport—it requires teammates.

What is a disciple?

A disciple is a student, a learner. Therefore, a Christian disciple is a follower and learner of Jesus.

Can’t I be a disciple on my own?

We are wired for community. Even those who prefer being by themselves need other people, and **Ecclesiastes 4:9–10** helps us know why:

⁹Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.

¹⁰If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson writes, “Spiritual formation takes place essentially in the company of friends, of peers.” Disciples learn, grow, and live out their faith best in the company of friends, and that’s primarily what a sponsor is: a friend and teammate.

Sounds great. But what do I do as a sponsor?

The following is not a definitive list, but here are **ten ideas** to get you going:

#1 Introduce yourself

Indeed, this is required if you’ve never met the person. But even if you’ve already met, you’ll be getting to know one another much deeper.

Set up a time to get to know one another. Meeting face-to-face over coffee or a meal is ideal, but, if necessary, find a time to talk over the phone.

#2 Ask lots of questions

Listen to their story. Ask about their spiritual background. Ask if they have any goals as a disciple/follower of Jesus. Ask why they want a sponsor.

#3 Help them learn how to find answers to their questions

Invite them to ask you questions, but whether you know the answers or not, let them know you won't be their Bible answer person. The best thing for them is to learn to find their own solutions.

Let them know about Bible commentaries, study Bibles, Bible apps, and helpful websites like gotquestions.org. They don't have to buy all or any of the resources you mention, but it's good for them to be aware of tools other than Google. (If you would like a list of resources to share, email gregg@shelterrockchurch.com.)

#4 Encourage them to look for God's activity and to listen for his instructions

Help them know they are never alone. God's Holy Spirit lives within them and will guide them every day, but they need to learn to look and listen. Practicing this is more art than science and may be something you still are discovering yourself. But help them know God is alive and wants to guide their lives.

A great way to start is to practice silence for 1-2 minutes several times a day. Be still and listen. And while walking or driving, ask God to speak and to reveal himself to you.

#5 Encourage next steps at church

Help your "sponsee" connect with our church. Introduce them to others, overview the class and small group opportunities with them, and encourage your sponsee to serve—a great way to step out in faith and get to know others!

#6 Help them identify and share their faith story

Ask what their life was like before meeting Jesus. How did they discover their need for Jesus? How is Jesus making a difference in their life today? Help them **reveal Jesus and his role** in their faith story.

Ephesians 4:13–14 (NLT)

¹³This [equipping the body of Christ] will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

#7 Teach them to feed themselves

This is the **ultimate goal**. Children are spoon-fed until they're old enough to control and utilize a fork and knife safely. The same is true in the spiritual world.

We must not spoon-feed Jesus' followers for long. They need to learn how to fuel their souls. Here are some ideas to get them started.

- If they take a class (like ALPHA or A Life Worth Exploring), have them text and/or discuss with you what they are learning. Ask them to look for ways to apply what they are learning and to share the results.
- If they are not taking a class, encourage them to read through a Bible book, or use a reading plan on an app like **YouVersion** or the **Bottom Line Bible**.

One good thing about the BLB is it sends one Bible chapter a day to your phone, but on the third day, it instead sends questions about the Bible reading from the previous two days. This forces users to slow down and reflect on what they previously read.

- **Share what you are learning** and **how you are applying** what you're learning. Remember, disciples are learners—life-long learners. We don't graduate until we are in the presence of Jesus.

#8 Establish boundaries

Determine when a person can and cannot contact you, and be specific. Can they call or text before 9 AM? After 9 PM? Are you only available on certain days?

How long will you be their sponsor? Six months to a year would be ideal but no fewer than three months. Have a formal end date, and after the determined period, feel free to informally invest in him or her as long as you like.

#9 Cast vision

Prepare them to be a sponsor. Ask them to begin praying about who they can invest in. Remind them **they do not have to know everything** to encourage a friend or family member to take a step of faith.

Encourage your sponsee to go through *Discipleship Essentials* with you or others after the designated sponsor period. It is a commitment and significant step of faith, but it will provide an overview and practical next steps for life as a disciple of Jesus. This is a wonderful "graduation" having a sponsor to learning to be a sponsor.

#10 Pray regularly

Regardless of whether or not you feel equipped to be a sponsor, God can and will use you. But you need to be dependent upon God. You cannot be there every moment of every day for the one you are sponsoring. But God can. You will never know everything. But God does. You can never meet all of his or her needs. But God can.

Teach your sponsee to pray. Don't pretend or try to be an expert. Just be someone who loves being in the presence of his heavenly father. Let your sponsee know God wants to hear from them and cares about the big and little things in their lives and the world. When your sponsee asks you to pray for them, do so. But invite them to pray first. Teach them to depend on God and to learn that their heavenly father loves them and loves to hear from them.

Finally, pray for God to grow this child in the faith into a mature disciplemaker. And ask God to help you grow, as well.

“Discipleship is a decision to live by what is true about God, not by what I feel about Him or myself or others.” —Eugene Peterson