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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What is the goal of discipleship?
2. On a scale from 1-10, how important is discipleship for a church? Explain your answer.
3. Have you ever been discipled? If so, explain what your discipleship experience was like.
4. Do most churches do discipleship well? Why or why not?

MATTHEW 28:16-20, NIV: 16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

THE MAIN IDEA

Many churches have discipleship programs but do not have a discipleship culture. As Christians, we know that we have been given the command by Jesus to make disciples of people from all nations, teaching them to obey everything He has taught us. Still, many churches have not thought or prayed about making disciples effectively or developing a discipleship culture.

Being a disciple of Jesus means modeling your life—thoughts, words, actions, everything—after the example and teaching Jesus has given us. The related word discipleship refers to the process through which Jesus turns us into people who trust and follow him. (Bobby Harrington & Alex Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits*). A disciple follows, is being changed by, and is committed to Jesus' kingdom mission. (Bobby Harrington & Alex Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits*). One of the primary ways God changes us to be more like Jesus is in Christian community, but the Christian community itself does not change us unless the members of that community are intentionally committed to coming alongside each other to help each other grow and become more like Christ. When discipleship becomes the focal point of church gatherings, a discipleship culture is developed. A discipleship culture is much different from the consumer culture prevalent in the United States, where people come to church to receive, be served, and be entertained rather than attending church to worship and minister to one another.

UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP

1 CORINTHIANS 11, ESV: Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:16-17, ESV: 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

- After being actively engaged in a local church community, do our lives resemble the life of Christ and the heroes of faith mentioned in the Bible, more or less? The answer to this question might give critical feedback about the church's health and whether there is a discipleship culture.

HOW DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?

- Most of us have been educated and trained to build, serve, and lead the church organization without being prepared to make disciples. Seminary degrees, church classes, and training seminars teach us to grow our volunteer base, form systems and organizational structures, or preach sermons on Sunday mornings and assimilate newcomers from the Sunday service.
- First comes discipleship, then comes the church, not vice versa. Effective discipleship builds the church. If you set out to make the church, focusing on the external superficial things such as buildings, well-polished worship teams, and flashy social media accounts, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. You will likely create consumers seeking a “worship experience” that religious professionals provide rather than genuine transformation.

HOW DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?

LIFE ON LIFE DISCIPLESHIP (FINDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN INVITATION AND CHALLENGE)

- **INVITATION:** We make disciples by formally inviting someone to do life together to become more like Christ in our desires, attitudes, and way of life. This invitation is vulnerable because it allows someone to access you and your life. It is good to form these groups with people in similar stages of life, same-sex, similar interests, and so forth. There should be a few strong leaders in each group who have been walking with the Lord for a while. When starting a life-on-life discipleship group, you must pray and ask God who He wants to bring into your life in this season of discipleship. The group should be at most ten people and set for some time (3 months, six months, one year). After the time ends, the group can reevaluate if they would like to continue or if they would like to invite others into the group. The group gatherings should be informal; having formal Bible studies or music worship in these groups is unnecessary. However, there should be a discussion about what people are learning and how they are experiencing Christ. There should be prayer in these groups.
- **CHALLENGE:** The temptation for these groups is to remain small social cliques that are centered around something other than spiritual growth. The goal is to challenge one another to seek the kingdom of God above all things aggressively. Prayer, genuine accountability, transparency, trust, and confidentiality should be built into the group.

THE WAY THAT WE LEARN AS DISCIPLES

CLASSROOM/LECTURE PASSING ON OF INFORMATION

The formal classroom experience is designed to communicate facts, thoughts, processes, and information to the learner (Breen, 2017, p. 30). This style of learning has limitations. Breen uses an illustration of a Plumber wanting to learn the skill of plumbing. He can become a formal student, learning in a classroom setting, listening to lectures, reading books, and doing homework assignments. Still, eventually, he would have to leave the classroom and actually fix a broken pipe (Breen, 2017, p. 30).

APPRENTICESHIP

Apprenticeship is essential for learning because it gives the learner firsthand exposure to what is being learned. In an apprenticeship, someone who is an expert at the craft being learned comes alongside the one desiring to learn and shows them how to do the practical tasks involved in the craft. The practice of apprenticeship is about investment. Someone invests their time, energy, skills, and life into ours, teaching us to do what they do (Breen, 2017, p. 32); by apprenticing yourself to someone, they teach you how to take things that are only in your head and put them into practice in a way that produces something (Breen, 2017, p. 35).

IMMERSION

Immersion is the most subtle way of learning. Immersion occurs when one has access to the culture they hope to be shaped by (Breen, 2017, p.33). When a person is immersed in a culture, the language, nuances, and everyday practices of the culture are learned intuitively (Breen, 2017, p. 35). Immersion works only when people are fluent in something. Since people born and raised in Westernized culture are not fluent in the Near East culture in which Jesus and his disciples lived, doing discipleship the way Jesus did is challenging. To learn how to become a disciple, one must be given access to a discipling culture (Breen, 2017, p. 33).

GIVING

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7, ESV: 6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

