

embers? Several years ago I went to see the pastor of a neighboring church about folk who had left our church for his. He did not even know about their existence until he looked them up on his computer, only to discover they had been attending his church for three months!

The reason for this personal relationship is that part of discipling is teaching each one according to their individual needs, background and potential. A one-size-fits-all discipling package simply does not exist, and therefore discredits all off-the-shelf discipleship manuals and programs as bogus.

Many multiplication systems have been based on discipleship. The theory is that each believer should have 12 disciples, and each disciple should have 12, etc. This is purely a multi-level marketing/pyramid scheme. Discipleship can never be forced and controlled by statistics because it is relational. And because discipleship is a relational and dynamic process, it can never be forced to comply with a statistical model. At times Paul had only one "disciple" travelling with him and at other times there were several. Neither Jesus nor Paul taught a numerical model, and it is evident that none of the Apostles attempted to recreate Jesus' "model" of twelve disciples.

Submission to the Teacher

A vital aspect of the relationship between teacher and disciple is the willingness of the disciple to submit to the teacher. This is one of the main reasons very little discipling happens in the Free World these days. Modern Christians are just not willing to submit to leaders. Modern believers consider themselves above correction and on a par with everyone else. Generally, "submission" only occurs as long as things go well and the relationship is affirming. The moment admonition, rebuke or discipline is needed the believer tends to leave the relationship, and the church, and withdraws from the relationship.

But without this submission there is no basis for a learner/teacher, follower/leader relationship. The whole purpose of discipleship is for the teacher to train the disciple. This includes not just the transmission of ideas and knowledge but actually having a hand in the shaping of the character and behavior of the learner. Paul's epistles are replete with instructions to rebuke, warn, correct, command, charge and admonish (2Tim 4:2; 1Thes 2:11; Col 1:28; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:15; etc.).

It goes without saying that the teacher may never overstep the bounds between legitimate and godly discipleship and heavy shepherding or abuse.

The first ingredient in the discipleship process then are disciples who want to learn and who want to follow.

Teachers With Dirty Hands

Just as you need those who are willing to learn, you need those who are willing to teach. But teaching is not just from the relative safety of the pulpit. True teachers are willing to get their hands soiled with the dirty diapers of babes in Christ. While there are many who want to preach, there are not many who want the hassle of discipling people.

Discipling is hard work. It means getting involved with people at a personal level, listening to their ideas, risking their anger when correcting them, repeating the same things over and over until the penny eventually drops. (Just think of how many times Jesus said the same things to His disciples and they still did not understand.) Discipling means feeling the pain of failure when those to whom you have become close end up falling, sometimes in the most terrible ways—"think of Peter denying the Lord! Discipling means flying blind without the help of a carefully prepared script or manual. Preaching is relatively easy since the preacher is on his own turf, controls the situation and is not interrupted. Discipling provides none of those safeguards. The teacher has to think on his feet and respond to the questions, arguments and reactions of the disciple over whom he has no direct control. There is just no way of knowing ahead of time what the disciple is going to come up with, say or do, next. It is this lack of a controlled environment that scares many leaders and prevents them from descending from the pulpit and engaging on a personal level with learners. Discipling does not have regular hours because people live life 24 hours a day. The pastor who wants to work to a carefully prepared schedule does not qualify, nor will he survive in the rough and tumble unpredictable world of real discipling.

And it is this unwillingness to accept the discomfort and pain of being a spiritual parent to spiritual (often wayward) children that has resulted in so few true teachers being available to disciple true believers. Thus without learners who are willing to learn, and without teachers who are willing to teach, no discipleship can take place.

The Cross

In addition to willing and capable teachers, and disciples that are eager to learn, there is a third vital ingredient without which no discipleship can take place and that is the cross.

Jesus Himself made this an entry requirement for disciples: "Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.'" (Luke 14:25-27). In all three the Synoptics Jesus said: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

This is not an optional extra for some disciples, it is essential for all disciples. Without the willingness of the follower to deny his own ideas, personality, desires, yea even his very self, he just cannot be a disciple. This is not because the Lord set an arbitrary standard, but because the essence of discipleship means the laying aside of self and being transformed into the likeness and image of Christ. This is not behavior modelling (see part 1), it is death (to self) and resurrection (in His image) on a daily basis.

No wonder Jesus had very few disciples. We expect it to be different for us, but it cannot be. In most cases where numbers of people are flocking to follow leaders the vital ingredient of the cross is missing. Hence the many things that are used as cheap substitutes for the cross.

Teaching How and What

Most teaching in modern churches is about the "what" of the faith, but discipleship is as much about the "how" as the "what." This is just where the problem often lies. Seminaries teach the "what" and those who come out of those seminaries only understand the "what." The "how" is learned at the feet of a true teacher and in the school of hard knocks. Obviously we do need to understand the "what" but without the "how" the "what" is of no value.

In the Great Commission, Jesus gives explicit instructions as to what needs to be taught in the process of making disciples: "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

Note that the command is to teach "to observe." This is in contrast with "teaching to know." The word "observe" literally means to do. The true disciple does what he was taught, thus head knowledge has to be translated into lifestyle and theory has to become practice. Very few Christians seem to know how to behave as Christians because they were never taught, neither in word nor by example. But that is what discipleship is really about. It is about becoming like Jesus (Romans 8:29) and becoming like Him is not about knowledge but it is about essence—who we are as evidenced through our lifestyle, values and actions.

Paul says: "You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;" (1 Thessalonians 2:10) and to Timothy: "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God" (1 Tim 3:15). Behavior and conduct are simply not taught any longer, yet that is the very essence of Christianity. The world is constantly telling believers how they ought to act, but the church does not. It is no wonder then, that believers act more like the world than like Christ.

The art of casting an artificial fly on the end of a fly rod is not rocket science, yet one can read a dozen books about it without ever being able to master the simple skill. It is only when an experienced teacher demonstrates how to do it, and then allows you to practice while correcting your mistakes, that you will ever learn how to present an artificial fly to a fish. Christianity is the same. It was never intended to be learned only from reading, preaching or talking. Jesus showed His disciples how to live and to die, and then expected them to put into practice what He had taught through His example and by His words.

As a result, Luke writes his Gospel concerning "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1)

Word Based

Unless the personal involvement, setting an example, or active teaching is based on the Scriptures, it is simply some humanistic effort, management technique or philosophy. Paul says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.â€ (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The purpose of the doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction is to equip people for â€every good work.â€ It is not merely for the sake of knowledge and, at the same time, is not good works based on some human philosophy. True discipleship is based on Scriptural principles that result in Godly living.

Discipleship at Home

Discipleship begins in the home. Parents are to disciple their children, teaching them by word and deed to be followers of Jesus Christ. But instead they choose to hire substitutes in the form of school teachers, Sunday school teachers, psychologists and an array of other hirelings. Meanwhile the parents are absent as they pursue their own selfish desires. These same absentee parents then turn around and blame everyone else when (not if) the child ends being more like the devil than Jesus.

Yet these same failed parents often want to be leaders in the church. Paul is emphatic that an elder must have proven his discipling skills at home (1 Timothy 3:5). It is in the home that parents learn and develop discipling skills which are later used in the church. And it is in the home that children learn to be good followers and learners. It is not coincidental that the New Testament uses babes, children, and the process of growing to maturity as an analogy of the life of a Christian. There are therefore very real parallels between raising children and discipling believers. Both require the same skills, prayer, patience, observing, teaching, wisdom, correcting, encouraging, rebuking etc. Failure at home almost guarantees failure in the church.

Jesus and the Twelve

After three years with Jesus, His disciples had heard His teaching on every important subject. The fact that they did not understand much is irrelevant because, in time, the Holy Spirit would remind them of what they had learned (John 14:26). Not only had they heard His words but they had seen His life. They saw His relationship with His Father, how He reacted, how He handled different situations and people, how He dealt with weariness, frustration, temptation, anger and every other human experience.

When Jesus called them, they were a motley bunch of losers, but at the end of that time He was able to send them out as His Apostles (sent ones) to lay the foundation of the church. That was successful discipling. They knew what to do, how to act and how to react. Yes, they were still fallible men, but they had been disciplined by Jesus and even their enemies could not deny that: â€Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.â€ (Acts 4:13).

Paul and Timothy

Paul had several disciples but the best of those was undoubtedly Timothy to whom Paul wrote, â€But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictionsâ€.â€ (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Notice again the juxtaposition of â€doctrineâ€ and â€manner of life.â€ Paul taught Timothy not only doctrine, but how to live. He taught him to live a life with a godly purpose, how to have faith in trials, how to endure pain, suffering and persecution, and how to fulfill his ministry.

Near the very end of Paulâ€™s life he wrote to Timothy â€And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.â€ (2 Timothy 2:2). Thus the pattern is perpetuated from one generation to the next.

We are not Jesus

But there is a vital difference between Jesus and usâ€ Jesus made disciples of Himself but we do not make disciples of ourselves. Cult and other false leaders make people followers of themselves but true discipleship makes people followers of Jesus. Thirty times the book of Acts refers to â€the disciples.â€ But never does it speak of disciples of Peter, John or Paul. â€Disciplesâ€ was always understood to mean disciples of Jesus. A true teacher will always point men to Jesus and call men to follow Himâ€ never to follow the teacher, his church, or some other human organization.

We are not called to clone or make copies of ourselves. We are to help people become like Jesus and to follow Him, and to ultimately learn from Him. The more those we teach resemble Him, the more successful they will be at making disciples.

ples.

Conclusion

Discipleship is not a technique or system. It is a lifestyle and is the essence of our faith. In its absence believers and churches become more worldly and less Christ-like. In spite of the proliferation of theological books and knowledge, we have abandoned our roots and failed to obey the command to make disciples. For this reason, more than any other, the church in the West has simply become an organization and has lost its life and light.

“When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

Hagner, Donald A. *Word Biblical Commentary. Matthew 14-28*. Thomas Nelson. 1995. p887.