

Discipleship Part 7

Barriers to being a disciple

1. Review
2. Choose Refirement instead of Retirement
 - a. Last week I laid down a challenge that many of you have much to give away...more than you even realize! You have gifts, experiences, lessons learned, a lifetime of wisdom and learning all that will go to the grave with you if you do not give them away! It is a lifetime of treasure that you have. You may not see its value, but I guarantee a young person hungers for it!
 - b. Won't you let someone learn from you?
 - c. I spoke to a 70 year old pastor this week who when asked about retirement said, "I will retire when God takes me home. I'm just now getting to the good stuff."
 - d. Are you in the "good stuff" now?
3. Making disciples is costly, time consuming and requires commitment, both to become a disciple as well as to make a disciple. (It is worth it though.)
 - a. Some things folks being discipled have already said:
 - i. "I felt valuable that someone would figure I was worth spending this time each week with."
 - ii. "I feel like I have found a family"
 - iii. "The accountability is helping me do what I might skip without knowing someone would be asking me about my bible reading."
 - b. Are you willing to be a disciple maker?
 - i. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*"
 1. These describe the activities of a discipler – teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.
 2. Did you notice that all but "teaching" is done "one-on-one?"
4. Today's Passage "John 6:52-69"
 - a. ⁵²*Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." ⁶⁶*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* ⁶⁷*"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."**
5. Did you notice, Jesus didn't ask them to stay with him, He didn't beg them not to leave. He didn't try to convince them or clarify for them. He simply let them leave!

- a. As I read this passage, I was amazed at how Jesus seemed to actually place roadblocks in front of people who were his followers. It seems as if Jesus is almost DISCOURAGING people from following Himself.
 - b. Contrast that to our seeming desperation to get someone to come to Christ or to stay in church.
 - c. Why was Jesus discouraging people from following himself? (this wasn't the first time he had done so either).
 - i. (Matthew 8:19-22) *Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea. Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."*
 - ii. Luke 9:61-62 *"Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"*
 - d. Think about this just for a minute, **"why did Jesus make it so hard to become His disciple?"**
 - i. When Jesus asked Peter, James, Andrew and John to "follow me" that he didn't beg them? Something inside of the disciples told them that being with him related to their destiny.
 - e. Or think about the other oddity, "why do we try to make it sound so easy?"
6. Perhaps the problem isn't with Jesus, but rather ourselves.
- a. Perhaps we have developed the wrong definition of what a Christian is and does.
 - b. Perhaps we have so dumbed down the gospel that we have a message that has lost its meaning?
 - c. I listened to Dallas Willard, a discipleship speaker this week. He spoke concerning the challenges churches have when they shift to a discipling model of church from other models. He even gave the example of a mega church (over 5000 members) that lost nearly 10% of their members and suffered a budget crisis because they changed from a "come and be wowed and entertained" model to the biblical model of "become a follower of Jesus Christ."
 - i. He further noted a terribly scary thing happens to people when you confront false beliefs and ideas about what they think a Christian is or does. They flee! When you make people uncomfortable and have to face a reality contrary to the one they THINK exists, they run away.
 - ii. **Discipling churches should teach and do everything Jesus taught and did.**
 1. Jesus didn't make it easy to follow Him. If anything, He made it very difficult.
 2. He told his followers that unless they denied themselves and took up their cross each day, they couldn't be his disciples. That was a picture of death he was painting.
 3. If we honestly evaluate from a worldly perspective, we would have to say that Jesus was doing a terrible job of selling his kingdom and his Messianic goals.
 - iii. Peter Lord was asked about how to disciple, the first thing he said, "Go with the goers.". He has expressed his disappointment with the shallowness of the Christian church in America and the lack of teaching what he called the "fundamentals" to new believers. Even late in his life, he has this sense of urgency and priority – as if he were saying to people, "Don't waste your time with people who aren't really seeking the kingdom first. Life's short."
 1. Peter Lord has a quirky question he asks when he speaks, "Are you with me?" But I think that's a question we need to continually ask of those we disciple, "Are you with me?"
 2. I also think that is what Jesus was asking people. Are you REALLY with me? Are you seeking the kingdom? Jesus only had time to disciple 12 men...He wanted hungry people to disciple. **Are you willing to be one of them?**

7. TRANSITION TO APPLICATION:

- a. **George Barna** conducted extensive research regarding the spiritual lives of adults and teenagers who have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and who expect eternal salvation because of their confession of sins and acceptance of Christ as their savior
 - i. When Christian adults were asked to identify their most important goal for their life, not a single person said it was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ, or to make disciples of Christ.
 - ii. Less than one out of every five born again adults had any specific and measurable goals related to their personal spiritual development.
 - iii. Less than 1% of all believers perceived a connection between their efforts to worship God and their development as a disciple of Jesus.
 - iv. When given thirteen basic teachings from the Bible, only 1% of adult believers firmly embraced all 13 as being biblical perspectives.
 - v. **Barna noted that most believers stated that their church does little to help them grow as a true disciple.** *"Few believers said that their church lacked programs, but most Christians complained that little is done to effectively motivate and facilitate their development as genuine, fervent followers of Christ. Most Christians are simply not making progress in their personal spiritual development."*
8. Here at Here's Hope we are in the midst of implementing a comprehensive discipleship PLAN. It is not a model that focuses upon knowledge but living out the truths of God's word in a radical manner that results in changed lives.
- a. A person asked Peter Lord what he thought about the church in America, he told them that he thought it could be a lot better and that he wouldn't recommend having a church of more than 12 people. Once you get larger than that, the weak people don't speak up, and church, he said, was particularly for the weak. If he could have done it over again, he wouldn't have preached so much. "No one remembers what you say, anyway," he said with a sigh. He lamented wasting so many words and so much time instead of choosing to disciple like Jesus did by taking a few key men and women aside and building into their lives
9. A fellow named Seth Barnes wrote, "So many times as a young man I felt alone and unnoticed. In my evangelical church, I had a youth group, but no real connection with an older man who sought me out and wanted to invest in me. Anything I got from others, I had to go after on my own."
- a. When you're hungry, you look for food. A starving orphans in our African will walk miles just to get one of the meals relief agencies serve. Their hunger drives them to a place where they meet their need.
 - b. Similarly, more of us need to recognize our deep unmet spiritual needs and begin looking for where we can be fed.
 - c. **Do you want to be discipled?** It won't happen if you just sit there. You've got to press into God in whatever ways that he is available to you.
 - i. Many people like the Jeremiah 29:11 verse, "For I know the plans I have for you..."
 - ii. But I like the verse that comes right after it, "*You'll seek me and find me when you seek me with your whole heart.*"
 - d. Wherever you are in life, God is waiting for you to press in to him and to involve others in encouraging you in your growth process.
 - i. Right now there are probably people one step ahead of you who could help you grow. But you've got to press into them.
 - ii. Want to pull out of that rut that you're in?
 - iii. Begin by making the decision to grow and to ask someone else for help in growing.
 - iv. Do it whole-heartedly and you'll find your Creator waiting for you.

Notes:

written curriculum can do for you is give you a basis to take a would-be disciple further in an intentional relationship. In other words, if someone wants to grow and the two of you need to talk about something to facilitate that growth, written curriculum can help. That said, please understand, the pendulum has swung way too far in the direction of Navigators Bible studies and the like as the sole basis for a discipleship relationship.

Discipleship must first be rooted in relationship. You ARE the curriculum. And, if you need something to help you and someone you know who wants to grow go somewhere together, then please, buy a Navigators study. But make that maybe 30% of the relationship. Or use it to break the ice and then take the relationship into the realm of normal human behavior - go to a football game, a coffee shop, a mission trip. When the disciple watches you modeling your faith, that's when their spiritual growth will really begin to take off.

Committing time and attention to one other person is an act of great bravery. It states, "I will be like God to you. I will show you in ways that you can feel, ways that are your reality, what God thinks about you.

Some things pass for discipleship and do nothing to form Christ in a person. They smell like the real thing, but are impotent as spiritual tools (2 Timothy 3:5). The evidence that the institution of the church in America has made this unfortunate exchange is its fruit. By most behavioral measures, Christians are undistinguishable from nonChristians. Divorce rates, abortion rates, gluttony rates and the like are roughly the same for both.

So, what are the primary tools that the institution of the church uses? First, is the practice of the Sunday church service with the sermon as its centerpiece. 2 Timothy 3:7 describes people who sit through these services unchanged: "always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth."

A distant second to the Sunday service is the Wednesday Bible study. These have the potential to be functional discipling tools, but as practiced are characterized by the James 2:23-24 phenomenon: Participants listen to the word, but don't take it to heart and apply it.

Real discipleship involves life change for people who are status quo addicts. Our fingers must be pried off the current behavior with which we are so comfortable. It doesn't happen at a distance or by remote control; usually, it requires life-on-life help from somebody.

*If Jesus invested three years in his disciples (that's 15,000 hours!) using an intensive model of ministry, that should be our pattern too. We've just gotten a little far afield from his pattern. □□ The average youth minister may get three hours a week invested in a student's life. That's 468 hours over three years. Not even 3% of Jesus' model. Of course we're going to fail! The amazing thing is that we'd so easily sell out to a model that has so little hope of success. The answer is radical: follow Jesus' pattern. Remember how skittish the disciples were after he'd died? They just barely caught on - it took time for them to get it. Making disciples takes time! It is relational, There are no shortcuts.

Rick Warren stuff: So what happens when leaders of Willow Creek stand up and say, "We made a mistake"?

Not long ago Willow released its findings from a multiple year qualitative study of its ministry. Basically, they wanted to know what programs and activities of the church were actually helping people mature spiritually and which were not. The results were published in a book, *Reveal: Where Are You?*, co-authored by Greg Hawkins, executive pastor of Willow Creek. Hybels called the findings "earth shaking," "ground breaking," and "mind blowing."

If you'd like to get a synopsis of the research you can watch a video with Greg Hawkins here. And Bill Hybels' reactions, recorded at last summer's Leadership Summit, can be seen here. Both videos are worth watching in their entirety, but below are few highlights.

In the Hawkins' video he says, "Participation is a big deal. We believe the more people participating in these sets of activities, with higher levels of frequency, it will produce disciples of Christ." This has been Willow's philosophy of ministry in a nutshell. The church creates programs/activities. People participate in these activities. The outcome is spiritual maturity. In a moment of stinging honesty Hawkins says, "I know it might sound crazy but that's how we do it in churches. We measure levels of participation."

Having put so many of their eggs into the program-driven church basket, you can understand their shock when the research revealed that "Increasing levels of participation in these sets of activities does NOT predict whether someone's becoming more of a disciple of Christ. It does NOT predict whether they love God more or they love people more."

Speaking at the Leadership Summit, Hybels summarized the findings this way: "Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back, it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for."

Hybels called this research "the wake-up call" of his adult life."

Hybels confesses: "We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between service, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own."

His Executive pastor says, "Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church. That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he's asking us to transform this planet."